To the Women

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TO THE WOMEN

By

MAHATMA GANDHI

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I like Anand Hingorani's idea of collecting my writings under suitable heads. The reader will not fail to appreciate the labour he has given to securing attractive printing & binding.

M.K. Gandhi

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TO THE

SWEET AND INSPIRING MEMORY

OF

MY SISTER

LALI

WHOSE LIFE WAS A GREAT LESSON IN WOMANLY VIRTUES AND A BRAVE EFFORT AT UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF HER SEX

THIS BOOK

IS MOST LOVINGLY DEDICATED

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Like the last edition this one is also a reprint. Due to paper scarcity, the volume is being restricted to its present size. I regret that it has not been possible for me to meet adequately the increasing demand for this book and that it may be some time yet before I am able to bring out a revised and enlarged edition of the same.

March 12, 1946
DANDI MARCH DAY

ANAND T. HINGORANI
Upper Sind Colony, Karachi (Sind)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

That there was a genuine need of a volume of this kind has been amply proved by the quick response it received at the hands of the public. It is gratifying to learn that in many a case it formed a most suitable wedding present to the girls from their parents, relatives or friends. This is as it should be. And I have no doubt that its popularity will increase with the increasing consciousness of its usefulness as a helpful companion to every Indian girl and woman.

The arrangement of the articles is the same as before and no new change has been introduced in this reprint. The price has been raised owing to the present abnormal times.

April 13, 1943
JALLIANWALLA BAGH DAY

ANAND T. HINGORANI
Upper Sind Colony, Karachi (Sind)

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In this second volume of the *Gandhi Series*, all the relevant matter pertaining to the women of India, taken from Gandhiji's various writings and speeches, has been presented in a way so as to give the reader as complete a picture as possible of Indian womanhood and its manifold needs and problems.

Woman has been held to be the better half of man. But Gandhiji goes further and acclaims her as "the mother, maker and silent leader of man," and regards her as "the noblest of God's creation." Those of us who are convinced of the truth of this estimate of woman and her role in society, will readily accord her the status that is hers as a matter of right, and revise their attitude towards her in conformity with such conviction.

On the other hand, those who belong to the old conventional school of thought, and who have been nurtured through centuries past on prejudice and false arrogant assumption of man's superiority over woman, will naturally find it hard, if not impossible, to reconcile themselves to such an appraisal of woman. To such persons this book cannot be recommended too strongly. For, if Gandhiji's views, as unfolded in these pages, fail to achieve the miracle and bring about an immediate complete conversion, they will, it is hoped, at least set in motion such forces as would result in due course in the desired mental transformation.

To the women of India, as indeed, in some measure to the women of the world, this book will serve as a guiding light in their moments of need and trial. For, it touches every aspect of woman's life, political, social and domestic, not excluding even the intimately personal; and for every one of the doubts, difficulties and dilemmas of the fair-sex, it prescribes a remedy that is at once compelling in character and elevating in effect.

October 2, 1941
GANDHI JAYANTI

ANAND T. HINGORANI
Upper Sind Colony, Karachi (Sind)

G.L.87

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THE HINDU WIFE

"Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, and has insisted on the complete merging of the wife in the husband. This has resulted in the husband sometimes usurping and exercizing authority that reduces him to the level of the brute."

The following is a summary of a long letter of a brother, describing the miseries of his married sister :

"Some time ago, my sister was married to a man whose character was hidden from us. This man has been discovered to be a rake, and no amount of dissipation and debauchery can satiate him. He has no sense of honour. My unfortunate sister found soon after her marriage that her 'lord' was sinking down more and more deeply day by day. She remonstrated. The man could not brook this, and in order to teach her a lesson, indulged in his excesses in front of her. He would also whip her, make her stand, starve her etc. She was tied to a post to compel her to witness his debaucheries. My sister is heart-broken. Her lamentations make us feel wretched. We are helpless. What would you advise her and us to do ? This is one of the most shameful aspects of Hinduism, where woman is left entirely at the mercy of man, and has no rights and privileges. If a man chooses to be cruel and heartless, there is no remedy left to the unfortunate woman. The man may go on making random alliances, and not a little finger can be raised against him; but a woman, once married, is at the utter mercy of her lord. Thousands of such women are groaning and weeping. As long as Hinduism is not purged of these and such like evils, can there be any hope of progress ?"

The writer is an educated man. His is a much more graphic description than the summary is of his sister's distress. The correspondent has sent me his full name and address. His condemnation of Hinduism, though pardonable under intense irritation, is based on a hysterical generalization from an isolated instance. For,

millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in their own homes. They exercize an authority over their husbands which any woman would envy. It is an authority which love gives. The case of cruelty brought to light by the correspondent is an illustration, not of the evil in Hinduism, but of the evil in human nature, which has been known to express itself under all climes and among people professing different faiths of the world. The facility for divorce has proved no protection against a brutal husband for a pliant wife incapable of asserting, and at times even unwilling to assert herself. It is, therefore, in the interest of reform for reformers to avoid hysterics and exaggerations.

Nevertheless, the occurrence, to which this article draws attention, is not an altogether uncommon occurrence in Hindu society. Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband, and has insisted on the complete merging of the wife in the husband. This has resulted in the husband, sometimes, usurping and exercizing authority that reduces him to the level of the brute. The remedy for such excesses, therefore, lies not through the law but through the true education of women as distinguished from unmarried girls, and through cultivating public opinion against unmanly conduct on the part of husbands. In the case in point, the remedy is incredibly simple. Instead of the brother and other relatives feeling helpless and weeping with the distressed girl, they should clothe her with protection, educate her to believe that it is no part of her duty to placate a sinful husband, or to seek his company. It is quite evident that the husband himself does not care for the wife. She may, therefore, without breaking the legal tie, live apart from her husband's roof and feel as if she had never been married.

Of course, there are two legal remedies open even to a Hindu wife, for whom a divorce is unobtainable, and that is to have the husband punished for common assault and to insist upon his supporting the wife. Experience

tells me that this remedy is, in most cases, if not in all, worse than useless, and it never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman, and makes the question of husband's reform more difficult, if not impossible, which after all should be the aim of society, more so of every wife. In the present instance, the girl's parents are well able to support her; but where it is not possible, the number of institutions that would give shelter to such ill-treated women is growing in the country.

There still remains the question of the satisfaction of the sexual appetite on the part of young women thus leaving the inhospitable roofs of their husbands, or being actually deserted by them when the relief given by divorce is unobtainable. But this is really not a serious grievance in point of numbers, for, in a society in which custom has discountenanced divorce for ages, a woman whose marriage proves unhappy does not want to be re-married. When public opinion in any social group requires that particular form of relief, I have no doubt that it will be forthcoming. So far as I understand the correspondent's letter, the grievance is not that the wife cannot satisfy her sexual appetite. The grievance is the gross and defiant immorality on the part of the husband. For this, as I have said, the remedy lies in a revision of the mental attitude. The feeling of helplessness is imaginary, as most of our ills are. A fresh outlook, a little original thinking is enough to dispel the grief brought about by defective imagination. Nor should friends and relatives, in such cases, be satisfied with the mere negative result of isolating the victim from the zone of tyranny. She should be induced to qualify herself for public service. This kind of training would be more than enough compensation for the doubtful privilege of a husband's bed.

A FAIR FRIEND'S QUESTIONS

"My ideal of a wife is Sita, and of a husband Rama. But Sita was no slave of Rama. Or, each was slave of the other. . . . The wife has a perfect right to take her own course, and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right, and when her resistance is for a nobler purpose."

A fair friend, who has some faith in my wisdom and sincerity, asks some knotty questions which I would fain avoid for fear of raising an indignant controversy on the part of some husbands jealous for their rights. But jealous husbands would spare me, for they know that I happen to be one myself, having led a fairly happy married life for the past forty years, in spite of occasional jars.

The first question is apposite and timely. The original is in Marathi. I have given a free rendering.

"Can a man or woman attain self-realization by mere recitation of *Ramanama* and without taking part in national service? I ask this question because some of my sisters say that they do not need to do anything beyond attending to family requirements, and occasionally showing kindness to the poor."

This question has puzzled not only women, but many men, and has taxed me to the utmost. I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching, unless, in order to secure verbal agreement, I were to put my own interpretation on it. In my humble opinion, effort *is* necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results. *Ramanama* or some equivalent is necessary, not for the sake of repetition, but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is, therefore, never a substitute for effort. It is meant for intensifying and

guiding it in proper channel. If all effort is vain, why family cares or an occasional help to the poor? In this very effort is contained the germ of national service. And national service, to me, means service of humanity, even as disinterested service of the family means the same thing. Disinterested service of the family, necessarily, leads one to national service. *Ramanama* gives one detachment and ballast, and never throws one off one's balance at critical moments. Self-realization I hold to be impossible without service of, and identification with, the poorest.

The second question is:

> "In Hinduism, devotion of wife to her husband and her complete merger in him is the highest aim, never mind whether the husband is a fiend or an embodiment of love. If this be the correct conduct for a wife, may she, in the teeth of opposition by her husband, undertake national service? Or, must she only go as far as the husband will permit her to go?"

My ideal of a wife is Sita, and of a husband Rama. But Sita was no slave of Rama. Or, each was slave of the other. Rama is ever considerate to Sita. Where there is true love, the question asked does not occur. Where there is no true love the bond has never existed. But the Hindu household of to-day is a conundrum. Husbands and wives, when they are married, know nothing of one another. Religious sanction, fortified by custom, and the even flow of the lives of the married people, keep the peace in the vast majority of Hindu households. But when either wife or husband holds views out of the ordinary, there is danger of jars. In the case of the husband, he has no scruples. He does not consider himself under any obligation to consult his partner's wishes. He regards his wife as his property. And the poor wife, who believes in the husband's claim, often suppresses herself. I think there is a way out. Mirabai has shown the way. The wife has a perfect right to take her own course, and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right, and when her resistance is for a

nobler purpose.

The third question is:

> "If a husband is, say, a meat-eater, and the wife considers meat-eating an evil, may she follow her own bent? May she even try, by all loving ways, to wean her husband from meat-eating or the like? Or, is she bound to cook meat for her husband, or worse still, is she bound to eat it, if the husband requires her? If you say that the wife may take her own course, how can a joint household be run when the one compels and the other rebels?"

This question is partly answered in the answer to the second. A wife is not bound to be an accomplice in her husband's crimes. And when she holds anything to be wrong, she must dare to do the right. But seeing that the wife's function is to manage the household and thus to cook, as the husband's is to earn for the family, she is bound to cook meat for the family if both have been meat-eaters before. If, on the other hand, in a vegetarian family, the husband becomes a meat-eater and seeks to compel the wife to cook for him, the wife is in no way bound to cook what offends her sense of right. The peace of the household is a most desirable thing. But it cannot be an end in itself. For me, the married state is as much a state of discipline as any other. Life is duty, a probation. Married life is intended to promote mutual good, both here and hereafter. It is meant also to serve humanity. When one partner breaks the law of discipline, the right accrues to the other of breaking the bond. The breach here is moral and not physical. It precludes divorce. The wife or the husband separates but to serve the end for which they had united. Hinduism regards each as absolute equal of the other. No doubt a different practice has grown up, no one knows since when. But so have many other evils crept into it. This, however, I do know that Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free to do what he or she likes for the sake of self-realization, for which and which alone he or she is born.

THE WOMAN IN THE SMRITIS

"It is sad to think that the *Smritis* contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own, and who regard her as the mother of the race."

A correspondent sends me an issue of *Indian Swarajya* published at Bezwada. It contains an article on the place of woman in the *Smritis*. From it I copy the following few extracts, without any alteration:

"The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual, and devoid of good qualities. (*Manu* 5-154).

"Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty. (*Yajnavalkya* 1-18).

"A woman has no separate sacrifice, ritual or fasting. She gains a high place in heaven by serving the husband. (*Manu* 5-145).

"She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the husband. She goes to hell. A woman, who is after the sacred waters, should wash the feet or the whole body of the husband and drink the water; and she attains the highest place. (*Atri* 136-137).

"There is no higher world for the woman than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displease the husband. (*Vasishtha* 21-14).

"That woman who prides in her father's family and disobeys the husband should be made by the king a prey to the dogs in the presence of a big assembly of people. (*Manu* 8-371).

"None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is to be known as a sensualist. (*Angiras* 69).

"If the wife disobeys the husband, when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then, for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away." (*Manu* 10-8).

It is sad to think that the *Smritis* contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own, and who regard her as the mother

of the race: sadder still to think that a newspaper published on behalf of orthodoxy should publish such texts as if they were part of religion. Of course, there are in the *Smritis* texts which give woman her due place and regard her with deep veneration. The question arises as to what to do with the *Smritis* that contain texts that are in conflict with other texts in the same *Smritis*, and that are repugnant to the moral sense. I have already suggested often enough that all that is printed in the name of scriptures need not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word. But everyone can't decide what is good and authentic, and what is bad and interpolated. There should, therefore, be some authoritative body that would revise all that passes under the name of scriptures, expurgate all the texts that have no moral value, or are contrary to the fundamentals of religion and morality, and present such an edition for the guidance of Hindus. The certainty, that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority, need not interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run, and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance.

WOMEN AND VARNA

"*Varna* does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only......The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides."

An esteemed friend writes :

"From your recent writing on *varna*, it seems that the principle of *varna* adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women? What would determine a woman's *varna*? Perhaps, you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her *varna* from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage, under that of her husband, and, in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children?

"Be that as it may, the fact remains that ours is an era of woman suffrage, and that she has definitely entered the lists with men in the pursuit of independent avocations. It is, thus, the commonest thing now-a-days to find a woman serving as a schoolmistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what *varna* would the woman, under these circumstances, belong? Under the *Varnashrama* dispensation, a man would normally take up the avocation and, therefore, also the *varna* of his parents, while a woman would adopt that of her parents; and they may well be expected to stick to their respective avocations after their marriage. To what *varna* between these would their children belong? Or, would you leave the question to be decided by the children themselves, by their free, independent choice? In the latter case, what becomes of the heredity basis of *varna* which the *Varnashrama Dharma*, as expounded by you, postulates?"

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing to-day. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion

of the *varnas* to-day, there are in reality no *varnas*, the *varna* principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four *varnas* to-day exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of *varna*, there is only one *varna* to-day for all, whether men or women; we are all *Shudras*.

In the resuscitated *Varna Dharma*, as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage will belong to the *varna* of her father, just like her brother. Inter-marriages between different *varnas* will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her *varna* unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different *varna*, then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his *varna* and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of *varna* be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities, since the institution of *varna* in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four *varnas*.

I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society, the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that 'for woman there can be no freedom' is not to me sacrosanct. It only shows that, probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangna*, 'the better half'; and *sahadharmini*, 'the help-mate.' The husband addressing the wife as *devi* or 'goddess' does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights

and privileges, and was reduced to a status of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her *varna*. For, *varna* does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the rôle of the woman in society is accepted, the question of the *varna* of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the *varnas* of the husband and wife.

POSITION OF WOMEN

"I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

A fair friend, who has hitherto successfully resisted the matrimonial temptation, writes:

"There was a Women's Conference yesterday at the Malabari Hall, (Bombay), at which many sound speeches were made, and many resolutions passed. The question of the evening was the Sarda Bill. We are so glad you uphold the age of 18 for girls. Another important resolution dealt with the laws of inheritance. What a help it would be if you wrote a strong article on this subject in *Navajivan* and *Young India*? Why should women have either to beg or to fight in order to win back their birth-right? It is strange—and also tragically comic—to hear man born of woman talk loftily of 'the weaker sex,' and nobly promising to give us our due! What is this nonsense about 'giving'? Where is the 'nobility' and 'chivalry' in restoring to people that which has been unlawfully wrested from them by those having brute power in their hands? Wherein are women less important than men? Why should their share of inheritance be less than that of men? Why should it not be equal? We were discussing this very heatedly with some people a couple of days ago. A lady said: 'We don't need any change in the law. We are quite content. After all, it is but fair that the son, who carries on the name and family traditions, should have the greater share. He is the mainstay of the family...' We said: 'And what about the girl?' 'Oh', intervened a strapping young man who was there, 'the other fellow will look after her!' There you are. The 'other fellow'! Always the other fellow! This other fellow is an absolute nuisance! *Why* should there be another fellow? Why should it be taken for granted that there *will* be another fellow? They talk as though a girl were a bale of goods, to be tolerated in the parental house until 'the other fellow' comes round, and then coolly handed over to him with a sigh of relief...Really, wouldn't you be wild if *you* were a girl?"

I do not need to be a girl to be wild over man's atrocities towards woman. I count the law of inheritance among the least in the list. The Sarda Bill deals with an evil far greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. But I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. As women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.

But to remove legal inequalities will be a mere palliative. The root of the evil lies much deeper than most people realize. It lies in man's greed of power and fame, and, deeper still, in mutual lust. Man has always desired power. Ownership of property gives this power. Man hankers also after posthumous fame based on power. This cannot be had, if property is progressively cut up in pieces, as it must be if all the posterity become equal co-sharers. Hence, the descent of property for the most part on the eldest male issue. Most women are married. And they are co-sharers, in spite of the law being against them, in their husbands' power and privileges. They delight in being ladies this and what not, simply for the fact of being the wives of particular lords. Though, therefore, they may vote for radical reform in academic discussions over inequalities, when it comes to acting up to their vote, they will be found to be unwilling to part with the privileges.

Whilst, therefore, I would always advocate the repeal of all legal disqualifications, I should have the enlightened women of India to deal with the root cause. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, and her advent to public life should, therefore, result in purifying it, in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property. Let them know that millions of men have no property to transmit to posterity. Let us learn

from them that it is better for the few to have no ancestral property at all. The real property, that a parent can transmit to all equally, is his or her character and educational facilities. Parents should seek to make their sons and daughters self-reliant, well able to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of the brow. The upbringing of minor children will, then, naturally devolve upon the major descendants. Much of the present imbecility of the children of the wealthy will go, if the latter could but substitute the worthy ambition of educating their children to become independent for the unworthy ambition of making them slaves of ancestral property, which kills enterprise and feeds the passions which accompany idleness and luxury. The privilege of the awakened women should be to spot and eradicate age-long evils.

That mutual lust, too, has played an important part in bringing about the disqualifications of the fair sex hardly needs any demonstration. Woman has circumvented man in a variety of ways in her unconsciously subtle ways, as man has vainly and equally unconsciously struggled to thwart woman in gaining ascendancy over him. The result is a stalemate. Thus viewed, it is a serious problem the enlightened daughters of *Bharat Mata* are called upon to solve. They may not ape the manner of the West, which may be suited to its environment. They must apply methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Theirs must be the strong, controlling, purifying, steadying hand, conserving what is best in our culture, and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis, not of amazons and prudes.

TREATMENT OF WOMEN

"I will far rather see the race of man extinct than that we should become less than beasts by making the noblest of God's creation the object of our lust."

Shrimati Sarladevi of Cuttack writes :

"Don't you admit that the treatment of women is as bad a disease as untouchability itself? The attitude of the young 'nationalists' I have come in contact with, is beastly in ninety cases out of a hundred. How many of the non-co-operators in India do not regard women as objects of enjoyment? Is that essential condition of success—self-purification—possible without a change of attitude towards women?"

I am unable to subscribe that the treatment of women is a 'disease as bad as untouchability?' Shrimati Sarladevi has grossly exaggerated the evil. Nor can the charge levelled against the non-co-operators of mere gratification of lust be sustained. A cause can only lose by exaggeration. At the same time, I have no difficulty about subscribing to the proposition, that in order to fit ourselves for true *Swaraj,* men must cultivate much greater respect than they have for woman and her purity. Mr. Andrews has struck a much truer note than this lady, when he tells us in burning language that we dare not gloat over the shame of our fallen sisters. That any non-co-operator could have been found willing to relate with gusto that there were some of these erring sisters who reserved themselves for non-co-operators, is a degrading thought. There can be no distinction between co-operators and non-co-operators in this matter of vital importance for our moral well-being. All of us men must hang our heads in shame, so long as there is a single woman whom we dedicate to our lust. I will far rather see the race of

man extinct, than that we should become less than beasts by making the noblest of God's creation the object of our lust. But this is not a problem merely for India. It is a world problem. And if I preach against the modern artificial life of sensual enjoyment, and ask men and women to go back to the simple life epitomized in the *charkha,* I do so because I know that, without an intelligent return to simplicity, there is no escape from our descent to a state lower than brutality. I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child-marriages. I shudder to see a child-widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed with brutal indifference contracts another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate, and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young man of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realize the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation.

To illustrate what I mean, let me relate the enchanting description a valued Mussalman friend gave me of a talk he had with a noted feminist in London. He was attending a meeting of feminists. A lady friend was surprised to find a Mussalman at such a meeting! She inquired how he found himself there. The friend said he had two major and two minor reasons for so doing. His father died when he was an infant. He owed all he was in life to his mother. Then, he was married to a woman who was a real partner in life. And he had no sons but four daughters, all minors, in whom as a father he was deeply interested. Was it any wonder that he was a feminist? He went on. Mussalmans were accused of indifference to women. There never was a grosser libel uttered. The law of Islam gave equal rights to women. He thought that man for his

lust had degraded woman. Instead of adoring the soul within her, he had set about adoring her body, and he had succeeded so well in his design, that woman to-day did not know that she had begun to hug her bodily adornment which was almost a sign of her slavery. He added, with his voice almost choked, if it was not so, how could it be that the fallen sisters delighted most in the embellishment of the body? Had we (men) not crushed the very soul out of them? No, he said, regaining self-possession, he wanted not only the mechanical freedom for women, he wanted also to break the shackles that bound them of their own will. And so he had intended to bring up his daughters to an independent calling.

I need not pursue the ennobling conversation any further. I want my fair correspondent to ponder over the central idea of the Mussalman friend's discourse and tackle the problem. Woman must cease to consider herself the object of man's lust. The remedy is more in her hands than man's. She must refuse to adorn herself for men, including her husband, if she will be an equal partner with man. I cannot imagine Sita ever wasting a single moment on pleasing Rama by physical charms.

REGENERATION OF WOMEN

"Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in very minutest detail in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him."

In the course of his speech at the Morarji Gokuldas Hall, Bombay, at the annual gathering of the Bombay Bhagini Samaj, Gandhiji said :

It is necessary to understand what we mean when we talk of the regeneration of women. It presupposes degeneration, and, if that is so, we should further consider what led to it and how. It is our primary duty to have some very hard thinking on these points. In travelling all over India, I have come to realize that all the existing agitation is confined to an infinitesimal section of our people, who are really a mere speck in the vast firmament. Crores of people of both the sexes live in absolute ignorance of this agitation. Full eighty-five per cent. of the people of this country pass their innocent days in a state of total detachment from what is going on around them. These men and women, ignorant as they are, do their bit in life well and properly. Both have the same education or rather the absence of education. Both are helping each other, as they ought to do. If their lives are in any sense incomplete, the cause can be traced to the incompleteness of the lives of the remaining fifteen per cent. If my sisters of the Bhagini Samaj will make a close study of the lives of these 85 per cent. of our people, it will provide them ample material for an excellent programme of work for the Samaj.

In the observations that I am going to make, I will confine myself to the 15 per cent. above mentioned, and

even then it would be out of place to discuss the disabilities that are common both to men and women. The point for us to consider is the regeneration of our women relatively to our men. Legislation has been mostly the handiwork of men; and man has not always been fair and discriminate in performing that self-appointed task. The largest part of our effort, in promoting the regeneration of women, should be directed towards removing those blemishes which are represented in our *Shastras* as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women. Who will attempt this and how? In my humble opinion, in order to make the attempt, we will have to produce women pure, firm and self-controlled as Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi. If we do produce them, such modern sisters will receive the same homage from Hindu society as is being paid to their prototypes of yore. Their words will have the same authority as the *Shastras*. We will feel ashamed of the stray reflections on them in our *Smritis*, and will soon forget them. Such revolutions have occurred in Hinduism in the past, and will still take place in the future, leading to the stability of our faith. I pray to God that this Association might soon produce such women as I have described above.

We have now discussed the root-cause of degeneration of our women, and have considered the ideals by the realization of which the present conditions of our women can be improved. The number of women who can realize those ideals will be necessarily very few, and, therefore, we will now consider what ordinary women can accomplish if they would try. Their first attempt should be directed towards awakening in the minds of as many women as possible a proper sense of their present condition. I am not among those who believe that such an effort can be made through literary education only. To work on that basis would be to postpone indefinitely the accomplishment of our aims; I have experienced at every step that it is not at all necessary to wait so long. We can bring home to our women the

sad realities of their present condition without, in the first instance, giving them any literary education. Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in very minutest detail in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity, as man is in his. This ought to be the natural condition of things, and not as a result only of learning to read and write. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve, and ought not to have. Many of our movements stop half way because of the condition of our women. Much of our work does not yield appropriate results; our lot is like that of the penny-wise and pound-foolish trader who does not employ enough capital in his business.

But although much good and useful work can be done without a knowledge of reading and writing, yet it is my firm belief that you cannot always do without a knowledge thereof. It develops and sharpens one's intellect, and it stimulates our power of doing good. I have never placed an unnecessarily high value on the knowledge of reading and writing. I am only attempting to assign its proper place to it. I have pointed out from time to time that there is no justification for men to deprive women or to deny to them equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy; but education is essential for enabling women to uphold these natural rights, to improve them and to spread them; again, the true knowledge of self is unattainable by the millions who are without such education. Many a book is full of innocent pleasure, and this will be denied to us without education. It is no exaggeration to say that a human being without education is not far removed from an animal. Education, therefore, is necessary for women as it is for men. Not that the methods of education should be identical in both cases. In the first place, our State system of educa-

tion is full of error, and productive of harm in many respects. It should be eschewed by men and women alike. Even if it were free from its present blemishes, I would not regard it as proper for women from all points of view. Man and woman are of equal rank, but they are not identical. They are a peerless pair, being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived, and, therefore, it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts, that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both. In framing any scheme of women's education, this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair, and, therefore, it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of woman, and, therefore, in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge. Not that knowledge should be divided into water-tight compartments, or that some branches of knowledge should be closed to anyone; but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed.

I should say a word or two as to whether English education is or is not necessary for our women. I have come to the conclusion that, in the ordinary course of our lives, neither our men nor our women need necessarily have any knowledge of English. True, English is necessary for making a living, and for active association in our political movements. I do not believe in women working for a living, or undertaking commercial enterprises. The few women, who may require or desire to have English education, can very easily have their way by joining the schools for men. To introduce English education in schools meant for women could only lead to prolong our helplessness. I have often read and

heard people saying, that the rich treasures of English literature should be opened alike to men and women. I submit, in all humility, that there is some misapprehension in assuming such an attitude. No one intends to close these treasures against women, while keeping them open for men. There is none on earth able to prevent you from studying the literature of the whole world, if you are fond of literary tastes. But when courses of education have been framed with the needs of a particular society in view, you cannot supply the requirements of the few who have cultivated a literary taste. In asking our men and women to spend less time in the study of English than they are doing now, my object is not to deprive them of the pleasure which they are likely to derive from it, but I hold that the same pleasure can be obtained at less cost and trouble if we follow a more natural method. The world is full of many a gem of priceless beauty; but, then, these gems are not all of English setting. Other languages can well boast of productions of similar excellence; all these should be made available for our common people, and that can only be done if our own learned men will undertake to translate them for us in our own languages.

Merely to have outlined a scheme of education as above, is not to have removed the bane of child marriage from our society, or to have conferred on our women an equality of rights. Let us now consider the case of our girls who disappear, so to say, from view after marriage. They are not likely to return to our schools. Conscious of the unspeakable and unthinkable sin of the child marriage of their daughters, their mothers cannot think of educating them or of otherwise making their dry life a cheerful one. The man who marries a young girl, does not do so out of any altruistic motives, but through sheer lust. Who is to rescue these girls ? A proper answer to this question will also be a solution of the woman's problem. The answer is, albeit, difficult, but it is only one. There is, of course, none to champion

her cause but her husband. It is useless to expect a child-wife to be able to bring round the man who has married her. The difficult work must, therefore, for the present at least, be left to man. If I could, I would take a census of child-wives and will find the friends as well as through moral and polite exhortations, I will attempt to bring home to them the enormity of their crime in linking their fortunes with child-wives, and will warn them that there is no expiation for that sin unless and until they have by education made their wives fit, not only to bear children, but also to bring them up properly, and unless in the meantime they live a life of absolute celibacy.

Thus, there are many fruitful fields of activity before the members of the Bhagini Samaj for devoting their energies to. The field for work is so vast that, if resolute application is brought to bear thereon, the wider movements for reform may for the present be left to themselves, and great service can be done to the cause of Home Rule without so much as even a verbal reference to it. When printing presses were non-existent, and scope for speech-making very limited, when one could hardly travel twenty-four miles in the course of a day instead of a thousand miles as now, we had only one agency for propagating our ideals, and that was our '*acts*'; and *acts* had immense potency. We are now rushing to and fro with the velocity of air, delivering speeches, writing newspaper articles, and yet we fall short of our accomplishments and the cry of despair fills the air. I, for one, am of opinion that, as in old days, our *acts* will have a more powerful influence on the public than any number of speeches and writings. It is my earnest prayer to your Association that its members should give prominence to quiet and unobtrusive work in whatever it does.

WHAT IS WOMAN'S ROLE?

"It is degrading both for man and woman, that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end."

With certain omissions, I quote below the following from a highly educated sister:

"You have shown the world, through *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, the dignity of the soul. These two words are the only solution to the problem of how to overcome man's baser nature.

"Education through crafts is not only a great idea, but the only right way of teaching, if we want our children to have self-reliance. It is you who have said it, and solved in one sentence the whole vast educational problem. The details could be worked out, according to circumstances and experience.

"I beg you to solve the problem of us, the women. Rajaji says that there is no women's problem. Perhaps, not in the political sense. Perhaps, it could be made by legislation not to matter in the professional sense, that is, all professions could be made equally open to men and women. But these things would not alter the fact that we are women, and as such, of a different quality from men. We need an additional set of principles, besides *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, to overcome our baser qualities. A woman's spirit, like a man's strives to attain better things. But just as there is need for *ahimsa* and *brahmacharya* for a man to get rid of his aggressive spirit, lust, brutish instincts of inflicting pain, etc., so there is for woman need of certain principles that would enable her to get rid of her baser qualities, which are different from men, and commonly said to belong by nature to her. The natural qualities of her sex, the upbringing meted out to her because of her sex, and her environment which is created because of her sex, all are against her. And in her work, these things, namely, her nature, upbringing and surroundings always get in the way and hinder her, and give occasion for the hackneyed phrase: 'She is only a woman, after all.' This is what I mean by sex hanging round one's neck. And I think that, if we only possess the correct solution, the correct method of improving ourselves, we

could make our natural qualities, such as, sympathy and tenderness, a help instead of a hindrance. The improvement, just as your solution in the case of men and children, must come from within us.

"I said nature, upbringing and environment. I will give an example to make myself clearer.

"Women by nature are intended to be soft, tender-hearted, sympathetic, to mother children. These things influence her, to a great extent, unconsciously. So when it comes to doing things, she becomes too emotional. When moving with men, she commits blunders. She is soft-hearted when she should not be so. She is temperamental, easily gets vain and generally acts in a silly way. When I came to see you, although I had desired the meeting very much, and spent the previous night sleepless thinking over it, when in your presence I was asked to sit down, I went and sat behind the broad back of Shri Desai. I could not hear and I prevented myself from seeing you. What a silly thing to do. Further, I found I could not explain myself, could not articulate. This I attribute to my being saddled with an emotional nature, which gets out of control easily. Of course, suitable training would have cured that particular fault, but I dare say I would commit some other equally silly act.

"A friend of mine showed me the answers she has written to a questionnaire, sent by the National Planning Sub-Committee for women's role. The questions, as you no doubt know, are numbered, and are something like this: 'To what extent, in your part of the country, is woman entitled to hold, acquire, inherit, sell or dispose of property in her own right? What provision has been made, or facilities available, for the appropriate education and training of women for the several kinds of work, and employment that women of different capacities may need to engage in?' She has not replied to the questions, but has written: 'We cannot say with an ounce of truth that women were not getting any education as such in the good old ancient days' and, 'in the Vedic period, the wife, on her marriage, was at once given an honoured position in the house and she was mistress in her husband's home,' etc., and has quoted Manu. I asked her what necessity there was to write about ancient customs, when the questionnaire was about present day ones. She murmured something about, thinking that a reply in the form of an essay would be nice, and brightened up saying Mrs. Some-one-else's reply was worse than hers. I think this mistake of my friend is due to lack of proper training, which was denied to her because she is a woman. Even a clerk would know that when one is asked a question, one should not write an essay on a different matter in

reply.

"I do not think I need go on quoting examples and explaining myself. You, with your vast experience of women of all kinds, would know whether I am right in saying that women lack the vital principle that would set them right.

"Your advice to me was to read *Harijan.* I do so eagerly. But so far I have not come across, well, the advice for the inner spirit. Spinning and fighting for the national freedom are only some aspects of the training. They do not seem to contain the whole solution. For, I have seen women who do spin and do try to work out the Congress ideals, and still commit blunders which are attributed to the fact of their being women.

"I do not want woman to become like man. But just as you have taught men *ahimsa* for their baser nature, do teach us the thing that would remove our sillier qualities. Tell us, please, how to make the best use of our qualities, how to turn our disadvantages into advantages.

"This, the burden of my sex, is with me always. Every time I have some one say: 'She is a woman, after all,' in a sneering way, my soul winces, if, that is, a soul is capable of wincing. A man, to whom I talked of these things, laughed at me and said: 'Did you see that child at our friend's house? He was playing at trains, and chugchugged along until he came against a pillar. Instead of going round it, he just tried to push it aside with shoulders, thinking, in his childish mind, that he could remove it. You remind me of him. What you say is a psychological thing. You make me laugh in your attempt to understand and solve it'."

I had flattered myself that my contribution to the women's cause definitely began with the discovery of *Satyagraha*. But the writer of the letter is of opinion that the fair sex requires treatment different from men. If it is so, I do not think any man will find the correct solution. No matter how much he tries, he must fail because nature has made him different from woman. Only the toad under the harrow knows where it pinches him. Therefore, ultimately, woman will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is, that just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one

cannot live without the other's active help[1].

But, somehow or other, man has dominated woman from ages past, and so woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that at some point there is bifurcation. Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence, the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread-winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the care-taker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care, the race must become extinct.

In my opinion, it is degarding both for man and woman, that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth, and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling his companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition, as there is in defending it against attack from without.

[1] *Replying to a question from an American lady visitor who interviewed him at Sevagram in Feb. 1937, Gandhiji said:*

> "I believe in the proper education of women. But I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with man. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of, by mimicking man. She has to be the complement of man."

As I have watched millions of peasants in their natural surroundings, and as I watch them daily in little Segaon (now, Sevagram), the natural division of spheres of work has forced itself on my attention. There are no women blacksmiths and carpenters. But men and women work on the fields, the heaviest work being done by the males. The women keep and manage the homes. They supplement the meagre resources of the family, but man remains the main bread-winner.

The division of the spheres of work being recognized, the general qualities and culture required are practically the same for both the sexes.

My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance truth and *ahimsa* in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader, and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex. If she is able to do this successfully, she must resolutely refuse to believe in the modern teaching that everything is determined and regulated by the sex impulse. I fear I have put the proposition rather clumsily. But I hope my meaning is clear. I do not know that the millions of men, who are taking an active part in the war, are obsessed by the sex spectre. Nor are the peasants, working together in their fields, worried or dominated by it. This is not to say or suggest that they are free from the instinct implanted in man and woman. But it most certainly does not dominate their lives, as it seems to dominate the lives of those who are saturated with the modern sex literature. Neither man nor woman has time for such things, when he or she is faced with the hard fact of living life in its grim reality.

I have suggested, in these columns, that woman is the incarnation of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means infinite love, which, again, means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it, as she carries the

infant and feeds it during nine months, and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who, again, suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was, or can be, the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world, thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in *satyagraha*, which does not require the learning that books give, but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

My good nurse in the Sassoon Hospital, Poona, as I was lying on a sick bed years ago, told me the story of a woman who refused to take chloroform, because she would not risk the life of the babe she was carrying. She had to undergo a painful operation. The only anæsthetic she had was her love for the babe, to save whom no suffering was too great. Let not women, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise their sex or deplore that they were not born men. The contemplation of that heroine, often makes me envy woman the status that is hers, if she only knew. There is as much reason for man to wish that he was born a woman, as for woman to do otherwise. But the wish is fruitless. Let us be happy in the state to which we are born, and do the duty for which nature has destined us.

WOMEN AND THEIR WORK

"In the new order of my imagination, all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women, in the new order, will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home."

Q. You say: "It is degrading both for man and woman, that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end." But what about the millions of female labourers in fields, factories, etc.? They are forced to forsake the hearth and become 'bread winners.' Would you abolish the industrial system, and revert to the Stone Age? Would that not be a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end? What is the new order that you envisage, where the sin of making women work will be absent?

A. If millions of women are forced to forsake their hearth and become bread winners, it is wrong, but not so wrong as shouldering the rifle. There is nothing inherently barbarous in labour. I see no barbarity in women voluntarily working on their fields, whilst they are looking after their homes. In the new order of my imagination, all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women, in the new order, will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home. Since I do not regard the rifle as a permanent feature in the new order, its use will be progressively restricted even so far as men are concerned. It will be tolerated as a necessary evil while it lasts. But, I would not deliberately contaminate woman with the evil.

WOMAN'S SPECIAL MISSION

"Woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in *ahimsa*. For the courage of self-sacrifice, woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute."

"I have read your articles on the recent European crisis with great joy. It was only natural that you should speak to Europe now. How could you restrain yourself when humanity was on the very verge of destruction?

"Will the world listen? That is the question.

"There is no doubt—judging from letters from friends in England—that people there went through absolute agony during that ghastly week. I am sure the same applies to the whole world. The mere thought of war—modern warfare—with its devilish ingenuity, and consequent pitiless butchery and bestiality—definitely made people think, as they had never thought before. 'The sigh of relief that was breathed, and the gratitude to God that went up from every heart when the news came through that war had been averted, are something that I can never forget as long as I live,' writes an English friend. And yet, is it just the fear of unspeakable suffering, the dread of losing one's nearest and dearest, of seeing one's country humiliated, that cause one to detest war? Are we glad war has been averted even at the humiliation of another nation? Would we have felt differently if the sacrifice of honour had been demanded of us? Do we hate war because we realize it is the wrong way to settle disputes, or is our hatred of it part and parcel of our fear? These are questions that must be answered in the right way, if war is really to vanish from the earth.

"The crisis over, however, what do we see? A more strenuous race than before for armaments, a more comprehensive and intensive organization than ever of all the resources available—of men, women, money, skill and talent—in the event of war! No avowed declaration that 'war shall not be' from anywhere! Is this not a recognition that war—however averted to-day—is still hanging over our heads as the proverbial sword of Damocles? To me, as a woman, it is painful to realize that my sex has not contributed to world peace the quota that should be ours by ins-

WOMEN AND THEIR WORK

"In the new order of my imagination, all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women, in the new order, will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home."

Q. You say: "It is degrading both for man and woman, that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end." But what about the millions of female labourers in fields, factories, etc.? They are forced to forsake the hearth and become 'bread winners.' Would you abolish the industrial system, and revert to the Stone Age? Would that not be a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end? What is the new order that you envisage, where the sin of making women work will be absent?

A. If millions of women are forced to forsake their hearth and become bread winners, it is wrong, but not so wrong as shouldering the rifle. There is nothing inherently barbarous in labour. I see no barbarity in women voluntarily working on their fields, whilst they are looking after their homes. In the new order of my imagination, all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women, in the new order, will be part-time workers, their primary function being to look after the home. Since I do not regard the rifle as a permanent feature in the new order, its use will be progressively restricted even so far as men are concerned. It will be tolerated as a necessary evil while it lasts. But, I would not deliberately contaminate woman with the evil.

WOMAN'S SPECIAL MISSION

"Woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in *ahimsa*. For the courage of self-sacrifice, woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute."

"I have read your articles on the recent European crisis with great joy. It was only natural that you should speak to Europe now. How could you restrain yourself when humanity was on the very verge of destruction?

"Will the world listen? That is the question.

"There is no doubt—judging from letters from friends in England—that people there went through absolute agony during that ghastly week. I am sure the same applies to the whole world. The mere thought of war—modern warfare—with its devilish ingenuity, and consequent pitiless butchery and bestiality—definitely made people think, as they had never thought before. 'The sigh of relief that was breathed, and the gratitude to God that went up from every heart when the news came through that war had been averted, are something that I can never forget as long as I live,' writes an English friend. And yet, is it just the fear of unspeakable suffering, the dread of losing one's nearest and dearest, of seeing one's country humiliated, that cause one to detest war? Are we glad war has been averted even at the humiliation of another nation? Would we have felt differently if the sacrifice of honour had been demanded of us? Do we hate war because we realize it is the wrong way to settle disputes, or is our hatred of it part and parcel of our fear? These are questions that must be answered in the right way, if war is really to vanish from the earth.

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tinct and prerogative to contribute. It pains me to read and hear of women's auxiliary corps being organized, of women being commandeered and volunteering to take their full share in the actual field, as well as behind the lines. And yet, when war comes, it is the women's hearts that are wrung in agony—it is their souls that are scarred beyond repair. It is all so inexplicable. Why is it that we have not chosen the better part through all the ages? Why have we, without murmur, bowed the knee to hideous, soulless, brute force? It is a sad commentary on our spiritual development. We have failed to understand our high calling. I am quite convinced that if women could only have a heart-understanding of the power and glory of non-violence, all would be well with the world.

"Why cannot you inspire and organize us—women of India? Why will you not concentrate on having us as your 'sword arm'? How often have I longed for you to undertake an all-India tour, just for this purpose? I believe that you would have a wonderful response, for the heart of Indian womanhood is sound, and no women, perhaps, in the world, have finer traditions of sacrifice and self-effacement behind them as we. Perhaps, if you would make something of us, we may, in however humble a manner, be able to show the way of peace to a sorrowing and stricken world. Who knows?"—*A Woman.*

I publish this letter not without hesitation. The correspondent's faith in my ability to stir the woman heart flatters me. But I am humble enough to recognize my limitations. It seems to me that the days of my touring are over. Whatever I can do by writing, I must continue. But my faith is increasing in the efficacy of silent prayer. It is by itself an art—perhaps, the highest art requiring the most refined diligence. I do believe that it is woman's mission to exhibit *ahimsa* at its highest and best. But why should it be a man to move the woman heart? If the appeal is addressed exclusively to me, not as man, but as the (supposed to be) best exponent of *ahimsa* to be practised on a mass scale, I have no urge in me to go about preaching the doctrine to the women of India. I can assure my correspondent that there is no want of will in me that deters me from responding to her appeal. My feeling is that if men of the Congress can retain their faith in *ahimsa,* and prosecute the non-

violent programme faithfully and fully, the women would be automatically converted. And it may be, that there shall arise one among them who will be able to go much further than I can ever hope to do. For, woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in *ahimsa*. For the courage of self-sacrifice, woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.

WOMEN AND MILITARISM

"Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice; but unfortunately to-day she does not realize what a tremendous advantage she has over man."

At various meetings in Europe, the question was pointedly asked as to how women may help in fighting militarism. In Italy, at a private meeting, Gandhiji was asked to tell the women of Italy something they could learn from the women of India.

"If only women will forget that they belong to the weaker sex," he said in Paris, "I have no doubt that they can do infinitely more than men against war. Answer for yourselves what your great soldiers and generals would do, if their wives and daughters and mothers refused to countenance their participation in any shape or form in militarism."

"I do not know," he said at Lausanne, "if I have the courage to give message for the women of Europe that you asked for. If I am to do so without incurring their wrath, I would direct their steps to the women of India who rose in one mass last year, and I really believe that if Europe will drink in the lesson of non-violence, it will do so through its women. Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but, unfortunately, to-day, she does not realize what a tremendous advantage she has over man. As Tolstoy used to say, they are labouring under the hypnotic influence of man. If they would realize the strength of non-violence, they would not consent to be called the weaker sex."

Speaking to a group of women in Italy, he said: "The beauty of non-violent war is, that women can play the same part in it as men. In a violent war, the women have

no such privilege, and the Indian women played a more effective part in our last non-violent war than men. The reason is simple. Non-violent war calls into play suffering to the largest extent, and who can suffer more purely and nobly than women? The women in India tore down the *purdah,* and came forward to work for the nation. They saw that the country demanded something more than their looking after their homes. They manufactured contraband salt, they picketed foreign cloth shops and liquor shops and tried to wean both the seller and the customer from both. At late hours in the night, they pursued the drunkards to their dens with courage and charity in their hearts. They marched to jails, and they sustained *lathi* blows, as few men did. If the women of the West will try to vie with men in becoming brutes, they have no lesson to learn from the women of India. They will have to cease to take delight in sending their husbands and sons to kill people, and congratulate them on their valour."—*M. D.*

TO THE WOMEN OF INDIA

> "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then, woman is immeasurably man's superior."

During his famous Dandi March, Gandhiji issued the following appeal to the Women of India:

The impatience of some sisters to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. It has led to the discovery that, however attractive the campaign against the Salt Tax may be, for them to confine themselves to it would be to change a pound for a penny. They will be lost in the crowd, there will be in it no suffering for which they are thirsting.

In this non-violent warfare, their contribution should be much greater than men's. To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then, woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women.

I have nursed this thought now for years. When the women of the *Ashrama* insisted on being taken along with men, something within me told me that they were destined to do greater work in this struggle than merely breaking Salt Laws.

I feel that I have now found that work. The picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops by men, though it succeeded beyond expectations up to a point for a time

in 1921, failed because violence crept in. If a real impression is to be created, picketing must be resumed. If it remains peaceful to the end, it will be the quickest way of educating the people concerned. It must never be a matter of coercion, but conversion, moral suasion. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman ?

Prohibition of intoxicating liquors and drugs, and boycott of foreign cloth have ultimately to be by law. But the law will not come, till pressure from below is felt in no uncertain manner.

That both are vitally necessary for the nation, nobody will dispute. Drink and drugs sap the moral well-being of those who are given to the habit. Foreign cloth undermines the economic foundations of the nation, and throws millions out of employment. The distress in each case is felt in the home and, therefore, by the women. Only those women, who have drunkards as their husbands, know what havoc the drink devil works in homes that once were orderly and peace-giving. Millions of women in our hamlets know what unemployment means. To-day, the *Charkha Sangh* covers over one hundred thousand women against less than 10,000 men.

Let the women of India take up these two activities, specialize in them, they would contribute more than men to national freedom. They would have access to power and self-confidence, to which they have hitherto been strangers.

Their appeal to the merchants and buyers of foreign cloth, and to the liquor dealers, and addicts to the habit, cannot but melt their hearts. At any rate, the women can never be suspected of doing or intending violence to these four classes. Nor can Government long remain supine to an agitation so peaceful and so resistless.

The charm will lie in the agitation being initiated and controlled exclusively by women. They may take, and should get as much assistance as they need, from men, but the men should be in strict subordination to

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them.

In this agitation, thousands of women literate and illiterate can take part.

Highly educated women have, in this appeal of mine, an opportunity of actively identifying themselves with the masses, and helping them both morally and materially.

They will find, when they study the subject of foreign cloth boycott, that it is impossible save through *khadi*. Mill-owners will themselves admit that mills cannot manufacture, in the near future, enough cloth for Indian requirements. Given a proper atmosphere, *khadi* can be manufactured in our villages, in our countless homes. Let it be the privilege of the women of India to produce this atmosphere, by devoting every available minute to the spinning of yarn. The question of production of *khadi*, is surely a question of spinning enough yarn. During the past ten days of March, under pressure of circumstances, I have discovered the potency of the *takli*, which I had not realized before.

It is truly a wonder worker. In mere playfulness, my companions have, without interrupting any other activity, spun enough yarn to weave 4 square yards per day of *khadi* of 12 counts. *khadi*, as a war measure, is not to be beaten. The moral results of the two reforms are obviously great. The political result will be no less great. Prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs means the loss of twenty-five crores of revenue. Boycott of foreign cloth means the saving by India's millions of, at least, sixty crores. Both these achievements would monetarily be superior to the repeal of the Salt Tax. It is impossible to evaluate the moral results of the two reforms.

'But there is no excitement and no adventure in the liquor and foreign cloth picketing,' some sisters may retort. Well, if they will put their whole heart into this agitation, they will find more than enough excitement and adventure. Before they have done with the agitation, they might even find themselves in prison. It is not improbable that they may be insulted, and even injured

bodily. To suffer such insult and injury would be their pride. Such suffering, if it comes to them will hasten the end.

If the women of India will listen and respond to my appeal, they must act quickly. If the all-India work cannot be undertaken at once, let those provinces, which can organize themselves, do so. Their example will be quickly followed by the other provinces.

CURSE OF DRINK

"Women do not know what influence for good they can exert on their husbands. They wield it unconsciously no doubt, but that is not enough. They must have that consciousness, and the consciousness will give them the strength, and show them the way to deal with their partners."

A sister writes:

"On going to the village....I was more than grieved to hear of the havoc drink is working among these people. Some of the women were in tears. What can they do? There is not a woman who would not like to banish alcohol for all time from our midst. It is the cause of so much domestic misery, poverty, ruined health and physique. As usual, it is the woman who has to bear the burden of this self-indulgence on the part of man. What can I advise the women to do? It is so hard to face anger, and even cruelty. How I wish the leaders in this province would concentrate on the removal of this evil, rather than expend time, energy and brain on the injustice of the Communal Award. We are so apt to neglect the things that really matter, for such trivialities as would settle themselves, if the moral stature of our people were raised. Can't you write an appeal to the people on the question of drink? It is sad to see these people literally going to perdition because of this curse."

My appeal to those who drink will be vain. It must be. They never read *Harijan*. If they do, they do so to scoff. They can have no interest in being informed of the evil of the drink habit. They hug the very evil. But I would like to remind this sister, and through her all the women of India, that at the time of the Dandi March the women of India did listen to my advice, and made the fight against drink and the plying of the wheel their speciality. Let the writer recall the fact that thousands of women fearlessly surrounded drink-shops and, often successfully, appealed to the addicts to give up the habit.

In the prosecution of their self-imposed mission, they put up with the abuses of the addicts and, sometimes, even assaults by them. Hundreds went to gaol for the crime of picketing drink-shops. Their zealous work produced a marvellous effect all over the country. But, unfortunately, with the cessation of Civil Disobedience, and even before the cessation, the work slackened. Into the reasons for the slackening, I need not go. But the work still awaits workers. The women's pledge remains unfulfilled. It was not taken for a definite period only. It could not be fulfilled, until prohibition was proclaimed throughout India. The women's was the nobler part. Theirs was to bring about prohibition by emptying drink-shops, by an appeal to the best in man. Could they have continued the work, their gentleness, combined with earnestness, would most assuredly have weaned the drunkard from his habit.

But nothing is lost. The women can still organize the campaign. If the wives of those of whom the writer writes are in earnest, they can surely convert their husbands. Women do not know what influence for good they can exert on their husbands. They wield it unconsciously no doubt, but that is not enough. They must have that consciousness, and the consciousness will give them the strength, and show them the way to deal with their partners. The pity of it is, that most wives do not interest themselves in their husbands' doings. They think they have no right to do so. It never occurs to them that it is their duty to become guardians of their husbands' character, as it is the latter's to be guardians of their wives' character. And yet, what can be plainer than that husband and wife are equal sharers of each other's virtues and vices? But, who but a woman can effectively awaken the wives to a sense of their power and duty? This is but a part of the women's movement against drink.

There must be enough women, with proper equipment, to study the statistics of drink, the causes that in-

duce the habit, and the remedies against it. They must learn the lesson from the past, and realize that mere appeals to the addicts to give up drink cannot produce lasting effects. The habit has to be regarded as a disease and treated as such. In other words, some women have to become research students and carry on researches in a variety of ways. In every branch of reform, constant study, giving one a mastery over one's subject, is necessary. Ignorance is at the root of failures, partial or complete, of all reform movements whose merits are admitted. For, every project, masquerading under the name of reform, is not necessarily worthy of being so designated.

TO THE NEWLY MARRIED

"It is being said that restraint and abstinence are wrong, and free satisfaction of the sexual appetite and free love is the most natural thing. There was never a more ruinous superstition."

At the annual meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Hudli, Gandhiji performed the marriage ceremonies of his grand-daughter and Shri Mahadev Desai's sister. After the ceremonies were over, he addressed the married couples as follows:

You must know that I do not believe in ceremonies, except to the extent that they awaken in us a sense of duty. I have had that attitude of mind ever since I began to think for myself. The *mantras* you have repeated, and the vows you have taken, were all in Sanskrit, but they were all translated for you. We had the Sanskrit text, because I know that the Sanskrit word has a power under the influence of which one would love to come.

One of the wishes, expressed by the husband during the ceremony, is that the bride may be the mother of a good and healthy son. The wish did not shock me. It does not mean that procreation is obligatory, but it means that if progeny is wanted, marriage performed in a strictly religious spirit is essential. He who does not want a child, need not marry at all. Marriage, for the satisfaction of sexual appetite, is no marriage. It is *vyabhichara*— concupiscence. To-day's ceremony, therefore, means that the sexual act is permitted only when there is a clear desire by both for a child. The whole conception is sacred. The act has, therefore, to be performed prayerfully. It is not preceded by the usual courtship, designed to provide

sexual excitement and pleasure. Such union may only be once in a life-time, if no other child is desired. Those who are not morally and physically healthy have no business to unite, and if they do, it is *vyabhichara*—concupiscence. You must unlearn the lesson, if you have learnt it before, that marriage is for the satisfaction of animal appetite. It is a superstition. The whole ceremony is performed in the presence of the sacred fire. Let the fire make ashes of all the lust in you.

I would also ask you to disabuse yourselves of another superstition which is rampant now-a-days. It is being said that restraint and abstinence are wrong, and free satisfaction of the sexual appetite and free love is the most natural thing. There was never a more ruinous superstition. You may be incapable of attaining the ideal, your flesh may be weak, but do not, therefore, lower the ideal, do not make irreligion your religion. In your weak moments, remember what I am telling you. The remembrance of this solemn occasion may well steady and restrain you. The very purpose of marriage is restraint and sublimation of the sexual passion. If there is any other purpose, marriage is no consecration, but marriage for other purposes besides having progeny.

You are being united in marriage as friends and equals. If the husband is called *swami,* the wife is *swamini*—each master of the other, each helpmate of the other, each co-operating with the other in the performance of life's tasks and duties. To you, boys, I would say that if you are gifted with better intellects and richer emotions, infect the girls with them. Be their true teachers and guides, help them and guide them, but never hinder them or misguide them. Let there be complete harmony of thought and word and deed between you. May you have no secrets from each other, may you be one in soul!

Don't be hypocrites, don't break your health in the vain effort of performing what may be impossible for you. Restraint never ruins one's health. What ruins one's health is not restraint, but outward suppression.

A really self-restrained person grows every day from strength to strength, and from peace to more peace. The very first step in self-restraint is the restraint of thoughts. Understand your limitations, and do only as much as you can. I have placed the ideal before you—the right angle. Try as best as you can to attain the right angle. But if you fail, there is no cause for grief or shame. I have simply explained to you that marriage is a consecration, a new birth, even as the sacred thread ceremony is a consecration and a new birth. Let not, what I have told you, alarm you or weaken you. Always aim at complete harmony of thought and word and deed. Always aim at purifying your thoughts, and everything will be well. There is nothing more potent than thought. Deed follows word, and word follows thought. The world is the result of a mighty thought, and where the thought is mighty and pure, the result is always mighty and pure. I want you to go hence armed with the armour of a noble ideal, and I assure you no temptation can harm you, no impurity can touch you.

Remember the various ceremonies that have been explained to you. Look at the simple-looking ceremony of *madhuparka*. The whole world is full of *madhu*—sweet nectar or honey—if only you will partake of it, after the rest of the world has taken its share of it. It means enjoyment by means of renunciation.

"But if there is no desire for progeny, should there be no marriage?" asked one of the bridegrooms.

Certainly not. I do not believe in Platonic marriages. In certain rare cases, men are known to have married women to protect the latter, and not for any physical union at all. But these cases are very rare, indeed. You must read all that I have written on pure married life. What I read in the *Mahabbharata* is daily growing upon me. Vyasa is described therein as having performed *niyoga*. He is not described as beautiful, but he was the reverse of it. His form is represented as terrible, he made no amorous gestures, but he smeared

his whole body with *ghee* before he performed the union. He performed the act, not for lust, but for procreation. The desire for a child is perfectly natural, and once the desire is satisfied, there should be no union.

Manu has described the first child as *dharmaja*—born out of a sense of duty, and children born after the first as *kamaja*—carnally born. That gives, in a nutshell, the Law of Sexual Relations. And, what is God but the Law? And, to obey God is to perform the Law. Remember that you were thrice asked to repeat: 'I will not transgress the Law in any respects.' Even if we had a handful of men and women prepared to abide by the Law, we should have a race of men and women stalwart and true.

Remember that I really came to enjoy my married life after I ceased to look at Ba (Kasturba) sexually. I took the vow of abstinence when I was in the prime of youth and health, when I was young enough to enjoy married life in the accepted sense of the term. I saw in a flash that I was born, as we all are, for a sacred mission. I did not know this when I was married. But on coming to my senses, I felt that I must see that the marriage subserved the mission for which I was born. Then, indeed, did I realize true *dharma*. True happiness came into our lives only after the vow was taken. Ba, though she looks frail, has a fine constitution and toils from morning until night. She would never have done so, had she continued to be the object of my lust.

And yet, I woke up late, in the sense that I had lived the married life for some years. You are lucky enough to be aroused in good time. Circumstances, when I was married, were as unpropitious as they could be. For you, they are as propitious as they could be. There was one thing, though, that I possessed and that carried me through. It was the armour of truth. That protected me and saved me. Truth has been the very foundation of my life. *Brahmacharya* and *ahimsa* were born later out of Truth. Whatever, therefore, you do, be true to your-

selves and to the world. Hide not your thoughts. If it is shameful to reveal them, it is more shameful to think them.

'STARTLING CONCLUSIONS'

"Both man and woman should know that abstention from satisfaction of the sexual appetite results not in disease, but in health and vigour, provided that mind co-operates with the body."

William R. Thurston, according to the publisher's preface, was a Major in the United States Army, which he served for nearly ten years. And, during these years, he had varied experiences in several parts of the world, including China. During his travels, he studied the effects of marriage laws and customs, as a result of which he felt the call to write a book on marriage. This book, which is called *Thurston's Philosophy Of Marriage* and was published last year by the Tiffany Press, New York, contains only 32 pages of bold type, and can be read inside of an hour. The author has not entered into an elaborate argument, but has simply set forth his conclusions which the publisher truly describes as 'startling'. In his foreword, the author claims to have based his conclusions on 'personal observation, data obtained from physicians, statistics of social hygiene and medical statistics,' compiled during the War. His conclusions are:

1. "That Nature never intended a woman to be bound to a man for life, and to be compelled to occupy the same bed or habitation with him, night after night, in pregnancy and out, in order to earn her board and lodging, and to exercize her natural right to bear children.

2. "That the daily and nightly juxtaposition of the male and female, which is a result of present marriage laws and customs, leads to unrestrained sexual intercourse which perverts the natural instinct of both male and female, and makes partial prostitutes of 90% of all married women. This condition arises from the fact, that married women have been led to believe that such prostitution of themselves is right and natural because it is legal, and

that it is necessary in order to retain the affections of their husbands."

The author, then, goes on to describe the effect of 'continual, unrestrained sexual intercourse', which I epitomize as follows:

(*a*) "It causes the woman to become highly nervous, prematurely aged, diseased, irritable, restless, discontented and incapable of properly caring for her children."

(*b*) "Among the poorer classes, it leads to the propagation of many children who are not wanted."

(*c*) "Among the higher classes, unrestrained sexual intercourse leads to the practice of contraception and abortion." "*If contraceptive methods, under the name of 'birth control' or any other name, are taught to the majority of the women of the masses, the race will become generally diseased, demoralized, depraved, and will eventually perish.*" (The italics are the author's).

(*d*) "Excessive sexual intercourse drains the male of the vitality necessary for earning a good living." "*At present, there are approximately* 2,000,000 *more widows in the United States than there are widowers. Comparatively few of these are War widows.*"

(*e*) "The excessive sexual intercourse, incident to the present married state, develops in the minds of both male and female a sense of futility." "*The poverty of the world to-day, and the slums of the larger cities are not due to lack of profitable labour to be performed, but to excessive, unrestrained sexual intercourse, resulting from present marriage laws.*"

(*f*) "Most serious of all, from the stand-point of the future of the human race, is sexual intercourse during pregnancy."

Then, follows an indictment of China and India, into which I need not go. This brings us to half of this booklet. The next half is devoted to the remedy.

The central fact of the remedy is, that husband and wife must always live in separate rooms, therefore, necessarily, sleep in separate beds, and meet only when both desire progeny, but especially the wife. I do not intend to give the changes suggested in the marriage laws. The one thing common to all marriages throughout the world is a common room and a common bed, and this the author condemns in unmeasured terms, I venture to think, rightly. There is

no doubt that much of the sensuality of our nature, whether male or female, is due to the superstition, bearing a religious sanction, that married people are bound to share the same bed and the same room. It has reproduced a mentality, the disastrous effect of which it is difficult for us, living in the atmosphere generated by that superstition, properly to estimate.

The author is equally opposed, as we have already seen, to contraceptive methods.

Many of the other remedies, suggested by the author, are, in my opinion, not of practical use to us, and, in any case, require legislative sanction. But every husband and wife can make a fixed resolution from to-day never to share the same room or the same bed at night, and to avoid sexual contact, except for the one supreme purpose for which it is intended for both man and beast.

The beast observes the law invariably. Man having got the choice has grievously erred in making the wrong choice. Every woman can decline to have anything to do with contraception. Both man and woman should know that abstention from satisfaction of the sexual appetite results, not in disease, but in health and vigour, provided that mind co-operates with the body. The author believes that the present condition of marriage laws 'is responsible for the greater part of all the ills of the world to-day'. One need not share this sweeping belief with the author to come to the two final decisions I have suggested. But there can be no doubt that a large part of the miseries of to-day can be avoided, if we look at the relations between the sexes in a healthy and pure light, and regard ourselves as trustees for the moral welfare of the future generations.

GL·87
TAMIL NAD GRAMA SEVAK VIDYALAYAM.
T. KALLUPPATTY POST,
MADURA DT.

A BIRTH-CONTROL ENTHUSIAST

> "The creation of a new life is nearest the divine. All I want is that one should approach that act in a divine way. That is to say, man and woman must come together with no other desire than that of creating a new life."

Quite a striking contrast to the old peasant, who had brought his all in the service of the poor, was Mrs. How-Martyn, the birth-control enthusiast from England, who had brought her gospel for the relief of the poor in India, and who came to convert Gandhiji or be converted. Of course, she has come to India for the first time, and has hardly seen anything of the poor. So she talked of her experience of the British slums, and put in a strong plea for the "poor woman" who had to submit to the strong man.

On her very first premise, Gandhiji joined issue. "There is no *poor* woman. Poor woman is mightier than man, and I am quite prepared to demonstrate it to you if you come to the villages of India. Any woman there would tell you that, if she did not want it, there was no man born of woman who could compel her. I can say this from my own experience in relation to my wife, and mine is no solitary instance. If the will to die rather than to yield is there, no monster can make the woman yield. No, it is a mutual affair. Men and women both are a mixture of the brute and the divine, and if we can subdue the brute, it is well and good."

"But what is the woman to do, if the man for the sake of having not more children goes to another woman?"

"So, now, you are shifting your own ground. If you misconceive your premises, you are bound to come to wrong conclusions. Don't assume things, and try to

unman man and unwoman woman. Let me understand the basis of your gospel. When I said your birth-control propaganda was sufficient introduction, there was some seriousness behind the joke, for I know that there are some men and women who think that in birth-control lies our salvation. Let me, therefore, understand the basis from you."

"I do not see in it the salvation of the world," said Mrs. How-Martyn, "but what I say is that without some form of birth-control there is no salvation. You would do it in one way, I would do it in another. I advocate your method as well, but not in all cases. You seem to regard a beautiful function as something objectionable. Two animals are nearest to the divine, when they are going to create new life. There is something very beautiful in the act."

"Here again you are labouring under a confusion," said Gandhiji. "The creation of a new life is nearest the divine, I agree. All I want is that one should approach that act in a divine way. That is to say, man and woman must come together with no other desire than that of creating a new life. But if they come together merely to have a fond embrace, they are nearest the devil. Man, unfortunately, forgets that he is nearest the divine, hankers after the brute instinct in himself and becomes less than the brute."

"But why must you cast aspersion on the brute?"

"I do not. The brute fulfils the law of his own nature. The lion in his majesty is a noble creature, and he has a perfect right to eat me up, but I have none to develop paws and pounce upon you. Then, I lower myself and become worse than the brute."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. How-Martyn, "I have expressed myself very badly. I confess, that in a majority of cases it is not going to be their salvation, but a factor which will conduce to higher life. You understand what I mean, though, I am afraid, I have not been able to make myself quite clear."

"Oh, no. I do not want to take any undue advantage of you. But I want you to understand my viewpoint. Do not run away with misconceptions. Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward; but as he has the brute in him, he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially, when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb. Man easily capitulates when sin is presented in the garb of virtue, and that is what Marie Stopes and others are doing. If I were to popularize the religion of indulgence, I know that men would simply clutch at it. I know that, if people like you in selfless zeal cried themselves hoarse upholding your doctrine, you might even ride to apparent victory, but I also know that you will ride to certain death, of course totally unconscious of the mischief you are doing. The downward instinct requires no advocacy, no argument. It is there embodied in them, and unless you regulate and control it, there is danger of disease and pestilence."

Mrs. How-Martyn, who until now seemed to accept the distinction between the divine and the devilish, contended that there was really none, and that they were much more allied than people imagine. That really is the thing at the back of all birth-control philosophy, and the enthusiasts forget that that is their Achilles' heel.

"So, you think the devil and the divine are the same? Do you believe in the sun? And if you do, don't you think you must believe in the shadow?" asked Gandhiji.

"Why should you call 'shadow' devil?"

"You may call it 'no-God', if you like."

"I do not think there is no-God in the shadow. There is life everywhere."

"There is a thing like absence of life. Do you know that Hindus will reduce the body of the dearest one to ashes, as soon as life in it is extinct? There is an essential unity in all life, but there is diversity, too, and one has to penetrate it and find the unity behind—but not by intellect, as you are trying to do. Where there is

truth, there must be untruth; where there is light, there must be shadow. You cannot realize the wider consciousness, unless you subordinate completely reason and intellect, and the body too."

Mrs. How-Martyn looked puzzled, and time was fast running against her. But Gandhiji said: "No. I am prepared to give you more time. But for that you must come to Wardha and stay with me. I am as great an enthusiast as you, and you must not leave India until you have converted me or converted yourself."

As I listened to the rapturous discourse, which other engagements had to bring to an end, I was reminded of the great words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Light looked down and beheld Darkness: 'Thither will I go,' said Light; Peace looked down and beheld War: 'Thither will I go,' said Peace; Love looked down and beheld Hatred: 'Thither will I go', said Love—and the word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."—*M. D.*

MRS. SANGER AND BIRTH-CONTROL

> "Man has regarded woman as his tool. She has learned to be his tool, and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the descent is easy."

Since the time Mrs. Margaret Sanger, the famous leader of the birth-control movement, paid a visit to Wardha, I have seen several different aspects of her. First as she appeared to me there during those remarkable interviews with Gandhiji—interviews in which she appealed to Gandhiji as a great moral teacher "to advise something practical, something that can be applied to solve the problem of too frequent child-bearing," "to give some message for those who are not yet sure, but who are anxious to limit their families." She seemed, during those conversations into which Gandhiji poured his whole being, desperately anxious to find out some point of contact with Gandhiji, to find out the utmost extent to which he could go with her. And he did indicate the extent. Her second aspect is revealed in her article in the *Illustrated Weekly of India,* in which she ridicules what she calls Gandhiji's "amazing boast" of having "known the experiences and the aspirations of thousands of women in India." Mrs. Sanger approached Gandhiji in Wardha for the solution of a tough problem, because as she herself said, "there were thousands, millions, who regard your word as that of a saint," and yet she ridicules his claim to know these women's "aspirations and experiences," thousands of whom marched to jail at his word. All she is concerned about in this article is to prove that Gandhiji does not know the women of India. She utters not a word about the points of agreement she sought

at the interview, and the extent to which Gandhiji said he was prepared to go with her. The third aspect is revealed in an address on "Woman of the Future" that she delivered before the World Fellowship of Faiths. I shall come to this later in my article.

To come to the interview. As I have already said, Gandhiji poured his whole being into his conversation. He revealed himself inside out, giving Mrs. Sanger an intimate glimpse of his own private life. He also declared to her his own limitations, especially the stupendous limitation of his own philosophy of life—a philosophy that seeks self-realization through self-control, and said that from him there could be one solution and one alone. "I could not recommend the remedy of birth-control to a woman who wanted my approval. I should simply say to her: "My remedy is of no use to you. You must go to others for advice." Mrs. Sanger cited some hard cases. "I agree," said Gandhiji, "there are hard cases. Else, birth-control enthusiasts would have no case. But I would say, do devise remedies by all means, but the remedies should be other than the ones you advise. If you and I, as moral reformers, put our foot down on this remedy, and said: "You must fall back on other remedies, those would surely be found." Both seemed to be agreed that woman should be emancipated, that woman should be the arbiter of her destiny. But Mrs. Sanger would have Gandhiji work for woman's emancipation through her pet device, just as believers in violence want Gandhiji to win India's freedom through violence, since they seem to be sure that non-violence can never succeed.

She forgets this fundamental difference in her impatience to prove that Gandhiji does not know the women of India. And she claims to prove this on the ground that he makes an impossible appeal to the women of India—the appeal to resist their husbands. Well, this is what he said: "My wife I made the orbit of all women. In her I studied all women. I came in contact with many

European women in South Africa, and I knew practically every Indian woman there. I worked with them. I tried to show them they were not slaves either to their husbands or parents, not only in the political field but in the domestic as well. But the trouble was that some could not resist their husbands. The remedy is in the hands of women themselves. The struggle is difficult for them, and I do not blame them. I blame the men. Men have legislated against them. Man has regarded woman as his tool. She has learned to be his tool, and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the descent is easy....I have felt that during the years still left to me, if I can drive home to women's minds the truth that they are free, we will have no birth-control problem in India. If they will only learn to say 'no' to their husbands when they approach them carnally. I do not suppose all husbands are brutes, and if women only know how to resist them, all will be well. I have been able to teach women to resist their husbands. The real problem is that many do not want to resist them....No resistance bordering upon bitterness will be necessary in 99 out of 100 cases. If a wife says to her husband: 'No, I do not want it,' he will make no trouble. But she hasn't been taught. Her parents, in most cases, won't teach it to her. There are some cases, I know, in which parents have appealed to their daughters' husbands not to force motherhood on their daughters. And I have come across amenable husbands, too. I want woman to learn the primary right of resistance. She thinks now that she has not got it."

What is there in this to show that Gandhiji did not know the women of India or did not know women, I do not understand. Jesus, who set the seal of his own blood upon his precept "love thine enemy," and "resist not evil", would be held to have uttered the precept in ignorance of mankind, simply because we are far away from realization of that principle !

Mrs. Sanger raises the phantasmagoria of "irritations, disputes, and thwarted longings that Mr. Gandhi's advice would bring into the home," of the absence of "loving glances," and of "tender good-night kisses," and of "words of endearment," forgetting all the while that birth-control and all its tender or vulgar accompaniments have contributed in America to countless irritations and disputes, divorces and worse. But the America we know, through books of a realist reformer like Upton Sinclair, would seem to be different from the America that Mrs. Sanger claims to know. She cited cases of great nervous and mental breakdowns, as a result of the practice of self-control. Gandhiji spoke from a knowledge of the numerous letters he receives every mail, when he said to her that "the evidence is all based on examination of imbeciles. The conclusions are not drawn from the practice of healthy-minded people. The people they take for examples have not lived a life of even tolerable continence. These neurologists assume that people are expected to exercize self-restraint, while they continue to lead the same ill-regulated life. The consequence is that they do not exercize self-restraint, but become lunatics. I carry on correspondence with many of these people, and they describe their own ailments to me. I simply say that if I were to present them with this method of birth-control, they would lead far worse lives."

He told her that when she went to Calcutta, she would be told by those who knew what havoc contraceptives had worked among unmarried young men and women. But evidently, for the purpose of the conversation, at any rate, Mrs. Sanger confined herself to propagation of knowledge of birth-control among married couples only.

Mrs. Sanger mocks at what she calls Mr. Gandhi's "appalling fear of licentiousness and over-indulgence" following upon a life of unrestrained birth-control, and she pointedly asks: "Has he ever thought that the same frequency can occur during the nine months of a

woman's pregnancy?" I must say that in advancing this argument, Mrs. Sanger is less than fair to her own sex. None but the most abnormally lewd or suppressed would submit to even legitimate sexual advances during pregnancy.

What was to be done with couples who wanted to resist the impulse of sex, and yet could not do so?

Mrs. Sanger was thus led on to her apotheosis of "sex love", which she said "is a relationship which makes for oneness, for completeness between husband and wife, and contributes to a finer understanding and a greater spiritual harmony." An obviously harmless proposition, but full of confusion when, in the same breath, one identifies love with lust and then tries to separate the one from the other. The distinction that Gandhiji drew between love and lust will be evident from the following excerpts from the conversation:

G: When both want to satisfy animal passion, without having to suffer the consequences of their act, it is not love, it is lust. But if love is pure, it will transcend animal passion and will regulate itself. We have not had enough education of the passions. When a husband says: "Let us not have children, but let us have relations," what is that but animal passion? If they do not want to have more children, they should simply refuse to unite. Love becomes lust, the moment you make it a means for the satisfaction of animal needs. It is just the same with food. If food is taken only for pleasure, it is lust. You do not take chocolates for the sake of satisfying your hunger. You take them for pleasure and then ask the doctor for an antidote. Perhaps, you tell the doctor that whisky befogs your brain, and he gives you an antidote. Would it not be better not to take chocolates or whisky?

Mrs. S: No, I do not accept the analogy.

G: Of course, you will not accept the analogy because you think this sex-expression, without desire for children, is a need of the soul, a contention I do not endorse.

Mrs. S: Yes, sex-expression is a spiritual need, and I claim that the quality of this expression is more important than the result, for the quality of the relationship is there regardless of results. We all know that the great majority of children are born as an accident, without the parents having any desire for conception. Seldom are two people drawn together in the sex act by their desire to have children......Do you think it possible for two people who are in love, who are happy together, to regulate their sex act only once in two years, so that relationship would only take place when they wanted a child! Do you think it possible?

G: I had the honour of doing that very thing, and I am not the only one.

Mrs. Sanger thought it was illogical to contend that sex-union for the purpose of having children would be love, and union for the satisfaction of the sexual appetite was lust, for the same act was involved in both. Gandhiji immediately capitulated, and said he was ready to describe all sexual union as partaking of the nature of lust. He made the whole thing abundantly clear by citing facts from his own life. "I know," he said, "from my own experience, that as long as I looked upon my wife carnally, we had no real understanding. Our love did not reach a high plane. There was affection between us always, but we came closer and closer the more we or rather I became restrained. There never was want of restraint on the part of my wife. Very often she would show restraint, but she rarely resisted me, although she showed disinclination very often. All the time I wanted carnal pleasure, I could not serve her. The moment I bad good-bye to a life of carnal pleasure, our whole relationship became spiritual. Lust died and love reigned instead."

But Mrs. Sanger, probably, regards every free embrace an act of love, and a married life without sexual relationship and its blandishments a dull, lifeless affair. Gandhiji's own personal witness made no impression upon

her. She dismissed it as that of an "idealist," as appears from her veiled sneer at "that small group of idealists who have sublimated their sex energies into creative action, into the activities of his own National Congress." I do not think during all his conversation, Gandhiji even once referred to the Congress or Congressmen. Mrs. Sanger forgets that all moral advancement has proceeded on the practice of a "small group of idealists," and that even the apparent progress of her own movement depends a lot on the clever way in which she idealizes her nostrum, and describes it as the upward path "demanding of us who inhabit this globe all that we possess in intelligence, knowledge, courage, vision and responsibility." The road that "leads to the fulfilment of human destiny on this planet."

Mrs. Sanger is so impatient to prove that Gandhiji is a visionary, that she forgets the practical ways and means that Gandhiji suggested to her.

"Must the sexual union take place only three or four times in an entire life-time?", she asked.

"Why should people not be taught," replied Gandhiji, "that it is immoral to have more than three or four children, and that after they have had that number they should sleep separately? If they are taught this, it would harden into custom. And if social reformers cannot impress this idea upon the people, why not a law? If husband and wife have four children, they would have had sufficient animal enjoyment. Their love may, then, be lifted to a higher plane. Their bodies have met. After they have had the children they wanted, their love transforms itself into a spiritual relationship. If these children die and they want more, then, they may meet again. Why must people be slaves of this passion when they are not of others? When you give them education in birth-control, you tell them it is a duty. You say to them that if they do not do this thing, they will interrupt their spiritual evolution. You do not even talk of regulation. After giving them education in birth-control,

you do not say to them: 'Thus far and no further.' You ask people to drink temperately, as though it was possible to remain temperate. I know these temperate people."

And yet, as Mrs. Sanger was so dreadfully in earnest, Gandhiji did mention a remedy which could conceivably appeal to him. That method was the avoidance of sexual union during unsafe periods, confining it to the "safe" period of about ten days during the month. That had at least an element of self-control, which had to be exercized during the unsafe period. Whether this appealed to Mrs. Sanger or not, I do not know. But therein spoke Gandhiji, the truth-seeker. Mrs. Sanger has not referred to it anywhere in her interviews or her *Illustrated Weekly* article. Perhaps, if birth-controllers were to be satisfied with this simple method, the birth-control clinics and propagandists would find their trade gone.

But I come to a third aspect of Mrs. Sanger. Her address to the World Fellowship of Faiths is most revealing. She frankly speaks there on behalf of her country, where "there are more criminal abortions performed than in any other country in the world. The national total of abortions has been estimated to top 2,000,000 per year. This total does not include the number brought about by drugs or by instruments used by the pregnant woman herself." Let it be remembered that it is not only the married woman who is thought of here. It is the unmarried woman too, and Mrs. Sanger would not really mind arming her with contraceptives. "The infinitely more complicated problem of abortion" can be only solved, she says, "by a proper, safe, dependable means of birth-control." In the present state of society, abortions are inevitable, and so birth-control is also inevitable! The vicious circle is complete. Mrs. Sanger makes a fervent appeal for preventing the "misuse and tragic waste of the greatest creative force within human nature itself." She forgets that contraceptives will provide the most infernal engine of that waste and misuse.

But I have come across in her address a startling

argument which would take away from the seriousness of all her other arguments. "Japan is breaking her own record for population increase! The whole crisis in the Far East—so menacing to the peace of the world at large—grows out of this "full speed ahead" cradle competition between Asiatic races. Is it not time for the League of Nations or the World Court to turn on this red traffic light? Japan's determination to find an outlet for this surplus population precipitates the so-called "undeclared war" against the Chinese, the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo, the breaking of solemn treaties, the sowing of the seeds of another World War." Another Yellow Peril? Is it a humanitarian that speaks here, or someone vastly different therefrom? I wonder.—*M. D.*

'A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS'

"The use of contraceptives is infinitely more tempting than the whisky bottle. But it is no more lawful than the sparkling liquid for its fatal temptation. Nor can opposition to the use of either be given up in despair, because their use seems to be growing."

"Just lately, I read a review of your conference with Mrs. Sanger, the birth-control advocate. I was so deeply moved that I am writing you to express my appreciation of your stand. God bless you for your courage.

"For the past thirty years I have been teaching boys. I have always advocated the control of the body, and urged boys to live unselfishly.

"When Mrs. Sanger was in my neighbourhood, the high school boys and girls took advantage of the information to carry on their illicit intercourse with no fear of results. Should Mrs. Sanger have her way, the time would come when the whole world would seek the sensual, and love would die. I realize it will take centuries to educate the public to higher ideals, but there is no time like the present to begin. I fear she mistakes passion for love, for love is of the spirit and never born of lust. Dr. Alexis Carrel agrees with you, in that sex-control is not harmful except to those who feed their passions, and are already unbalanced. Mrs. Sanger is wrong in saying that most doctors believe abstinence is harmful. I find many leading doctors and scientists, belonging to the American Social Hygiene Association, hold that control is beneficial.

"You are doing a noble work. I have followed with interest all the vicissitudes of your life-long struggle. You are one of the few who have this higher spiritual view-point on the sex question. I want you to know I reach out to you across the great waters in fellowship.

"Let us keep up the good work so that youth may know the truth, for the hope of the future is in their hands.

"I add a quotation from one of my talks to boys:

'Create—always create. To create is noble, uplifting, inspiring. But the moment you seek to gratify the senses by merely enjoying the creative powers, you begin to cheat creation and to des-

troy all those higher spiritual forces within you. It can end only in disappointment.

'Creation, physical, mental and spiritual, is joy and life. If you are merely seeking the sensations of the flesh, with no thought of creating, or even trying to avoid the aim of creation, you are perverting nature and killing your spiritual powers.

'The result will be passion uncontrolled,—exhaustion, disappointment and defeat. It can never bring out those finer qualities on which we can build a new race of spiritual men and women.'

"I know this is like a prophet crying in the wilderness, but I am convinced of the truth of it, and I can but point the way."

This is one of the letters, which I occasionally get from America, in condemnation of the use of contraceptives. Current literature, that India imports weekly from the Far West, would have us believe that in America none but idiots and imbeciles oppose the use of this modern method of deliverance from the bondage of the superstition which imprisons the body and crushes it by denying it its supreme enjoyment. That literature produces as much momentary intoxication as the act, which it teaches and incites us to perform without incurring the risk of its ordinary result. I do not put before the readers of *Harijan* merely letters of individual condemnation received from the West. They have their use for me as a seeker, but very little for the general reader. This letter, however, from a teacher of boys with thirty years' experience behind him, has a definite value. It should serve as a guide for Indian teachers and the public men and women—who are carried away by the overwhelming tide. The use of contraceptives is infinitely more tempting than the whisky bottle. But it is no more lawful than the sparkling liquid for its fatal temptation. Nor can opposition to the use of either be given up in despair, because their use seems to be growing. If the opponents have faith in their mission, it has to be pursued. A voice in the wilderness has a potency which voices uttered in the midst of 'the madding crowd' lack. For, the voice in the wilderness has meditation, deliberation, and unquenchable

faith behind it, whilst the babel of voices has generally nothing but the backing of the experience of personal enjoyment, or the false and sentimental pity for the unwanted children and their suffering mothers. Argument of personal experience has as much weight as an act of a drunkard. The argument of pity is a trap into which it is dangerous to fall. Sufferings of unwanted children, and of equally unwanted motherhood, are punishments or warnings devised by beneficent Nature. Disregard of the law of discipline and restraint is suicide. Ours is a state of probation. If we refuse to bear the yoke of discipline we court failure: like cowards we avoid battle and give up the only joy of living.

BIRTH-CONTROL—I

"Birth-control through self-control is no doubt difficult. But no one has yet been known seriously to dispute its efficacy, and even superiority over the use of contraceptives."

A co-worker, who is a careful reader of my writings, was disturbed to read that I was likely to approve of the 'safe-period' method of birth-control. I endeavoured to make it clear to the friend, that the safe-period method did not repel me as did the use of contraceptives, and that it was open largely only to married couples. But the discussion of the topic led us into much deeper waters than either of us had expected. The fact, that my friend was repelled by the safe-period method as much as by that of contraceptives, showed to me that he believed in the possibility of ordinary persons practising the restraint imposed by the *Smritis, i.e.,* the union between husband and wife was permitted only when the parties really desired to have children. Whilst I knew the rule, I had never regarded it in the light that I began to do at the discussion. All these long years, I had regarded it as a counsel of perfection not to be carried out literally, and that so long as married couples carried on intercourse by mutual consent, but without special regard to the desire for progeny, they were carrying out the purpose of marriage without breaking any positive injunction of the *Smritis*. But the new light in which I viewed the *Smriti* text was a revelation to me. I understood now, as I never had done before, the statement that married people, who strictly observed the injunction of the *Smritis*, were as much *brahmacharis* as those who were never married and lived chaste lives.

The sole object of sexual intercourse, according to

the new light, was the desire for progeny, never gratification of the sexual instinct. Simple gratification of the instinct would be counted, according to this view of marriage, as lust. This may appear to be a harsh expression to use for our enjoyment which has hitherto been regarded as innocent and legitimate. But I am not dealing with custom. I am dealing with the science of marriage as propounded by Hindu sages. Their presentation may be faulty, it may be altogether wrong. But for one like me, who believes in several *Smriti* texts as inspired and based on experience, there is no escape from a full acceptance of their meaning. I know no other way of finding the truth of things, and testing certain old texts in accordance with their full meaning, no matter how hard the test may appear and how harsh its deductions may sound.

In the light of what I have said above, birth-control by contraceptives and the like is a profound error. I write thus with a full sense of my responsibility. I have great regard for Mrs. Margaret Sanger and her followers. She impressed me much by her great zeal for her cause. I know that she has great sympathy for the women who suffer, because they have to bear the burden of carrying and rearing unwanted children. I know also that this method of birth-control has the support of many Protestant divines, scientists, learned men and doctors, many of whom I have the honour of knowing personally, and for whom I entertain high regard. But I should be false to my God, who is Truth and nothing but Truth, if I concealed my belief from the reader or these great advocates of the method. Indeed, if I hid my belief, I should never discover my error, if my present belief is one. Moreover, its declaration is due to those many men and women who accept my guidance and advice in many moral problems, including this one concerning birth-control.

That birth requires to be regulated and controlled is common cause between the advocates of contraceptives

and the like. The difficulty of control through self-restraint is not to be denied. Yet there is no other way of attaining the end, if mankind is to fulfil its destiny. It is my innermost conviction that if the method under discussion gains universal acceptance, mankind will suffer moral deterioration. This I say in spite of the evidence to the contrary that is often produced by the advocates of the method.

I believe I have no superstition in me. Truth is not truth merely because it is ancient. Nor is it necessarily to be regarded with suspicion because it is ancient. There are some fundamentals of life, which may not be lightly given up because they are difficult of enforcement in one's life.

Birth-control through self-control is no doubt difficult. But no one has yet been known seriously to dispute its efficacy, and even superiority over the use of contraceptives.

Then, I feel that the full acceptance of the implication of the injunction of the *Shastras*, as to the strictly confined use of the sexual act, makes the observance of self-control much easier than if one regards the act itself as a source of supreme enjoyment. The function of the organs of generation is merely to generate progeny, obviously of the highest type possible, for the married couple. This can and should only take place when both parties desire, not sexual union but progeny which is the result of such union. Desire for such union, therefore, without the desire for progeny, must be considered unlawful and should be restrained.

The possibility of such control for the ordinary man will be examined in the next issue.

BIRTH-CONTROL—II

> "Birth-control by contraceptives, no doubt, regulates to a certain extent the number of new comers, and enables persons of moderate means to keep the wolf from the door. But the moral harm it does to the individual and society is incalculable."

There is nothing in our society to-day which would conduce to self-control. Our very upbringing is against it. The primary concern of parents is to marry their children anyhow, so that they may breed like rabbits. If they are girls, they are married at as early an age as they conveniently can be, irrespective of their moral welfare. The marriage ceremony is one long-drawn-out agony of feasting and frivolity. The householder's life is in keeping with the past life. It is a prolongation of self-indulgence. Holidays and social enjoyments are so arranged as to allow one the greatest latitude for sensuous living. The literature, that is almost thrust on one generally, panders to the animal passion. The most modern literature almost teaches that indulgence in it is a duty, and total abstinence a sin.

Is it any wonder if control of the sexual appetite has become difficult, if not almost impossible? If, then, birth-control through self-restraint is the most desirable and sensible and totally harmless method, we must change the social ideal and environment. The only way to bring about the desired end is for individuals, who believe in the method of self-control, to make the beginning themselves, and with unquenchable faith to affect their surroundings. For them, the conception of marriage I discussed last week has, it seems to me, the greatest significance. A proper grasp of it means a complete mental revolution. It is not meant merely for a few select individuals. It is pre-

sented as the law of the human species. Its breach reduces the status of human beings, and brings swift punishment in the shape of multiplicity of unwanted children, a train of ever-increasing diseases, and disruption of man as moral being responsible to his Maker. Birth-control by contraceptives, no doubt, regulates, to a certain extent, the number of new comers, and enables persons of moderate means to keep the wolf from the door. But the moral harm it does to the individual and society is incalculable. For one thing, the outlook upon life for those who satisfy the sexual appetite for the sake of it is wholly changed. Marriage ceases to be a sacrament for them. It means a revaluation of the social ideals, hitherto prized as a precious treasure. No doubt, this argument will make little appeal to those who regard the old ideals about marriage as a superstition. My argument is only addressed to those who regard marriage as a sacrament, and a woman not as an instrument of animal pleasure, but as mother of man and trustee of the virtue of her progeny.

My experience of self-control, by fellow-workers and myself, confirms me in the view presented here. It assumes overwhelming force from the discovery in a vivid light of the ancient conception of marriage. For me, *brahmacharya* in married life now assumes its natural and inevitable position, and becomes as simple as the fact of marriage itself. Any other method of birth-control seems useless and unthinkable. Once the idea, that the only and grand function of the sexual organ is generation, possesses man and woman, union for any other purpose they will hold as criminal waste of the vital fluid, and consequent excitement caused to man and woman as an equally criminal waste of precious energy. It is now easy to understand why the scientists of old have put such great value upon the vital fluid, and why they have insisted upon its strong transmutation into the highest form of energy for the benefit of society. They boldly declare that one, who has acquired a perfect control over his or her sexual energy, strengthens the whole being, physical, mental

and spiritual, and attains powers unattainable by any other means.

Let not the reader be disturbed by the absence of many or any living specimen of such giant *brahmacharis*. The *brahmacharis* we see about us to-day are very incomplete specimens. At best, they are aspirants who have acquired control over their bodies but not their minds. They have not become proof against temptation. This is not because *brahmacharya* is so difficult of attainment. Social environment is against them, and the majority of those who are making an honest effort unknowingly isolate the control of the animal passion from all other passions, whereas the effort to be successful must include control over all the passions to which man is prey. Whilst *brahmacharya* is not impossible of attainment by the average man and woman, it must not be supposed that it requires less effort than that required by an average student, who has set his heart upon becoming a master of any one of the sciences. Attainment of *brahmacharya*, in the sense here meant, means mastery of the Science of Life.

A WITNESS FROM AMERICA

"Control over the organ of generation is impossible without proper control over all the senses. They are all inter-dependent."

Miss Mabel E. Simpson of Montana (U. S. A.) writes to the Editor:

"I greatly enjoyed Mr. Gandhi's article on birth-control, displaying his usual clear sight into the heart of things. If he had visited America twenty years ago when birth-control was disapproved, and now when it is in full swing, he would know that it brings moral deterioration. But he would not be able to convince anybody of it, for it also brings the blindness to both moral and spiritual perception, that makes it impossible for its followers to discern with sensitivity along high moral and spiritual lines. If India follows the West in this, it will surely lose two of its most priceless and beautiful jewels: affection for little children, and reverence for parenthood. America has lost both—and does not know it. Could you print a statement of the meaning of *brahmacharya*? I have been asked about it, and while I have an idea, I am not sure enough to attempt to explain it to others. Thank you."

The reader may place what value he or she chooses on this piece of evidence. I suggest, however, that such evidence against the use of contraceptives is worth far more than that of those who claim to derive benefit from their use. The reason is obvious. The benefit, in the sense that advent of children is often checked, is not denied. What is contended is that the moral harm the use does is incalculable. Miss Simpson has given us a measure of such harm.

Now, for the definition—the meaning—of *brahmacharya*. Its root meaning may be given thus: that conduct which puts one in touch with God.

The conduct consists in the fullest control over all the senses. This is the true and relevant meaning of the word.

Popularly, it has come to mean mere physical control over the organ of generation. This narrow meaning has debased *brahmacharya* and made its practice all but impossible. Control over the organ of generation is impossible without proper control over all the senses. They are all inter-dependent. Mind on the lower plane is included in the senses. Without control over the mind, mere physical control, even if it can be attained for a time, is of little or no use.

FOR CONTRACEPTIVES

"He is no warrior who fights outside foes of his imagination, and is powerless to lift his little finger against the innumerable foes within, or what is worse, mistakes them for friends."

A correspondent writes:

"I would like to say a few words on the report of the interview between Mrs. Sanger and Mahatma Gandhi that appeared recently in the *Harijan*.

"The cardinal fact, that I see missed in the interview, is that it has not been taken into consideration that man is, above all, an artist and a creator. He is not satisfied with bare necessity, but must have beauty, colour and charm as well. 'If ye have one pice only, buy bread of it; if two, one worth of bread and one worth of flower'—said Prophet Mahomed. In it is embodied a great psychological truth—the truth, that man is by nature an artist. That is why we find him engaged in making his raiment something more than the mere necessity of sustaining his body. He has made every necessity into an art, and has spent tons of blood on them. His creative instinct impels him to add to his difficulties and problems and solve them over again. He *cannot* be 'simple' as Rousseau, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau and Gandhiji would like him to be. War he must have as its necessary corollary, which also he has transformed into a great art.

"To appeal to him, the example of Nature would be in vain, for it is totally incompatible with his very being. Nature *cannot* be his teacher. Those who appeal to it overlook that it does not only consist of hills and dales and flower-beds, but flood, cyclone and earthquake as well. 'From an artistic stand-point,' says Nietzsche, the iconoclast, 'Nature is no model. It exaggerates, distorts and leaves gaps. Nature is the *accident*. To study from Nature seems to me a bad sign; thus lying in the dust before trivial facts is unworthy of a thorough artist. To see what is the function of another order of intellects, the *anti-artistic*, the matter-of-fact, one must know *who* one is.' We know that the wild beasts eat raw flesh out of the need of sustaining their bodies, and not out of taste. We also know of the rutting season of Nature outside which none meets sexually there. But it is, to quote

our philosopher again, 'unworthy of a thorough artist' that man by nature is. To end sexual life when the need of propagation is no longer there, or to enjoin sex-communion expressly with the desire of begetting offspring, is too calculating, too natural, too 'matter-of-fact' as our philosopher just now said, to appeal to his strong artistic taste. Hence, he has quite another aspect of sexual love, which is independent of the desire to multiply, as has been revealed by such authorities as Havellock Ellis and Marie Stopes, but which, though originating in the soul, is, nevertheless, incomplete without the bodily union, so long as we do not get the soul all by itself, but through the instrument of the body. To cope with the *effect* of such a union is altogether a different problem, and herein is the task of the birth-control movement. But if the task be shifted to a re-arrangement of the soul itself—for 'self-control' is nothing different from this—by external discipline, we are not sanguine that it would prove all the purposes that are expected of it, nor would the movement of control over birth without a firm psychological basis.

"I would close with a further remark that by this I do not mean to underrate the value of the discipline of self-control, or what is technically known as *brahmacharya*. I would always admire it as the art of the control of the sex instinct carried to perfection. But just as the perfection of other arts does not interfere with the *science* of life, with the *whole* life (in the Nietzschean sense of the term), with the proper scheme of all the values of life,—so also, I will not allow the value of the ideal of *brahmacharya* dominate other values, far less use it as an *instrument* of solving problems, such as over-population. We have made such a hobgoblin of it! We have heard of the 'war-babies.' Should we refuse giving credit to those soldiers, who brought victory for their countrymen by their blood, because they happened to give birth to those war babies? Nobody would. I believe it was with an eye to such a scheme of values that the scriptures (प्रश्नोपनिषद) said: 'ब्रह्मचर्यमेव तद यद रात्री रत्या संयुज्यते' or, there is *brahmacharya* where sexual union occurs only at the night (*i.e.*, as opposed to abnormal co-habitation during the day-time). Here, normal sex-life itself is spoken of as *brahmacharya*, the rigid conception of which began after we had already topsy-turvied the proper scheme of all the values of life."

I gladly publish this letter, as I should any such letter that is not full of declamation, abuse or insinuations. The reader should have both the sides of the question to enable him to come to a decision. I am myself eager

to know why a thing, which is claimed to be scientific and beneficial and which has many distinguished supporters, repels me, notwithstanding my effort to see the bright side of it.

Thus, it is not proved to my satisfaction that sexual union in marriage is in itself good and beneficial to the unionists. To the contrary effect, I canbear ample testimony from my own experience and that of many friends. I am not aware of any of us having derived any benefit, mental, spiritual or physical. Momentary excitement and satisfaction there certainly was, but it was invariably followed by exhaustion. And, the desire for union returned immediately the effect of exhaustion had worn out. Although I have always been a conscientious worker, I can clearly recall the fact that this indulgence interfered with my work. It was the consciousness of this limitation that put me on the track of self-restraint, and I have no manner of doubt that the self-restraint is responsible for the comparative freedom from illness that I have enjoyed for long periods and for my out-put of energy and work, both physical and mental, which eye-witnesses have described as phenomenal.

I fear that the correspondent has misapplied his reading. Man is, undoubtedly, an artist and creator. Undoubtedly he must have beauty and, therefore, colour. His artistic and creative nature at its best taught him to discriminate, and to know that any conglomeration of colours was no mark of beauty, nor every sense of enjoyment good in itself. His eye for art taught man to seek enjoyment in usefulness. Thus, he learnt at an early stage of his evolution that he was to eat not for its own sake, as some of us still do, but he should eat to enable him to live. At a later stage, he learnt further that there was neither beauty nor joy in living for its own sake, but that he must live to serve his fellow creatures and through them his Maker. Similarly, when he pondered over the phenomenon of the pleasurableness of sexual union, he discovered that like every other organ of sense this one of generation had

its use and abuse. And he saw that its true function, its right use was to restrict it to generation. Any other use he saw was ugly, and he saw further that it was fraught with very serious consequences, as well to the individual as to the race. It is hardly necessary for me to prolong the argument.

The correspondent says well that man makes art out of his necessities. Necessity is not only the mother of invention, it is the mother also of art. We should, therefore, beware of that art which has not necessity as its basis.

Nor may we dignify every want by the name of necessity. Man's estate is one of probation. During that period he is played upon by evil forces, as well as good. He is ever prey to temptations. He has to prove his manliness by resisting and fighting temptations. He is no warrior who fights outside foes of his imagination, and is powerless to lift his little finger against the innumerable foes within, or what is worse, mistakes them for friends. 'War he must have.' But the correspondent is wrong when he says that 'as its necessary corollary, he has transformed it into a great art.' He has hardly yet learnt the art of war. He has mistaken false war for true, even as our forefathers, under a mistaken view of sacrifice, instead of sacrificing their base passions, sacrificed innocent non-human fellow creatures, as many even do at the present day. We have yet to learn the art of true war. Surely, there is neither beauty nor art in what is going on to-day on the Abyssinian frontier. The correspondent has chosen unhappy (for him) names for his illustrations. Rousseau, Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy were first class artists of their time. They will live even after many of us are dead, cremated and forgotten.

The correspondent seems to have misapplied the word 'Nature.' When an appeal to man is made to copy or study Nature, he is not invited to follow what the reptiles do or even what the king of the forest does. He has to study man's nature at its best, *i.e.,* I presume his

regenerate nature, whatever it may be. Perhaps, it requires considerable effort to know what regenerate nature is. It is dangerous now-a-days to refer to old teachers. I suggest to the correspondent that it is unnecessary to bring in Neitzsche or even *Prashnopanishad.* The question for me is past the stage of quotations. What has cold reason to say on the point under discussion? Is it or is it not correct to say that the only right use of the generative organ is to confine it solely to generation, and that any other use is its abuse? If it is, no difficulty in achieving the right use and avoiding the wrong should baffle the scientific seeker.

FOR WOMEN REFORMERS

"To ask India's women to take to contraceptives is, to say the least, putting the cart before the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her the sacredness of her body, and to teach her the dignity of national service and service of humanity."

From a serious discussion I had with a sister, I fear that my position on the use of contraceptives has not yet been sufficiently undertood. My opposition is not due to their having come to us from the West. I thankfully use some Western things when I know that they benefit us, as they benefit those in the West. My opposition to contraceptives is based on merits.

I take it that the wisest among the protagonists of contraceptives restrict their use to married women, who desire to satisfy their and their husbands' sexual appetite without wanting children. I hold this desire as unnatural in the human species, and its satisfaction detrimental to the spiritual progress of the human family. As against this, is often cited the following testimony, among others, of Lord Dawson of Penn:

"Sex love is one of the clamant, dominating forces of the world. Here we have an instinct, so fundamental, so imperious that its influence is a fact which has to be accepted: suppress it you cannot. You may guide it into healthy channels, but an outlet it will have, and if that outlet is inadequate or unduly obstructed, irregular channels will be forced. Self-control has a breaking point, and if in any community marriage is difficult or late of attainment, an increase of irregular unions will inevitably result. All are agreed that union of body should be in association with union of mind and soul; all are agreed that the rearing of children is a pre-eminent purpose. Has not sexual union, over and over again, been the physical expression of our love without thought or intention of procreation? Have we all been wrong? Or, is it

that the Church lacks that vital contact with the realities of life, which accounts for the gulf between her and the people? Authority, and I include under authority the churches, will never gain the allegiance of the young, unless their attitude is more frank, more courageous, and more in accordance with realities.

"Sex love has, apart from parenthood, a purport of its own. It is an essential part of health and happiness in marriage. If sexual union is a gift from God, it is worth learning how to use it. Within its own sphere it should be cultivated so as to bring physical satisfaction to both, not merely to one. The attainment of mutual and reciprocal joy in their relations constitutes a firm bond between two people, and make for durability of their marriage tie. More marriages fail from inadequate and clumsy-sex love, than from too much sex love. Passion is a worthy possession; most men who are any good are capable of passion. Sex love without passion is a poor lifeless thing. Sensuality, on the other hand, is on a level with gluttony, a physical excess. Now that the revision of the Prayer Book is receiving consideration, I should like to suggest, with great respect, that an addition be made to the objects of marriage in the Marriage Service in these terms: 'The complete realization of the love of this man and this woman, the one for the other.'

"I will pass on to consider the all-important question of birth-control. Birth-control is here to stay. It is an established fact, and for good or evil has to be accepted. No denunciations will abolish it. The reasons, which lead parents to limit their offspring, are sometimes selfish, but, more often, honourable and cogent. The desire to marry and rear children well-equipped for life's struggle, limited incomes, the cost of living, burdensome taxation, are forcible motives; and further, amongst the educated classes, there is the desire of women to take part in life and their husbands' careers, which is incompatible with oft-recurring pregnancies. Absence of birth-control means late marriages, and these carry with them irregular unions and all the baneful consequences. It is idle to decry illicit intercourse, and interpose obstacles to marriage at one and the same time. But say many: 'Birth-control may be necessary, but only the birth-control which is justifiable is voluntary abstention.' Such abstention would be either ineffective or, if effective, impracticable and harmful to health and happiness. To limit the size of a family to, say, four children, would be to impose on a married couple an amount of abstention which for long period would almost be equivalent to celibacy, and when one remembers that, owing to economic reasons, the abstention would have to be more strict during the early years of marriage life when desires

are strongest, I maintain a demand is being made which, for the mass of people, it is impossible to meet; that the endeavours to meet it would impose a strain hostile to health and happiness, and carry with them grave dangers to morals. The thing is preposterous. You might as well put water by the side of a man suffering from thirst and tell him not to drink it. No, birth-control by abstention is either ineffective, or, if effective, is pernicious.

"It is said to be unnatural and intrinsically immoral. Civilization involves the chaining of natural forces and their conversion to man's will and uses. When anæsthetics were first used at child-birth, there was an outcry that their use was unnatural and wicked, because God meant woman to suffer. It is no more unnatural to control child-birth by artificial means. The use of birth-control is good, its abuse bad. May I end by an appeal that the Church approach this question, in common with certain others, in the light of modern knowledge and the need of a new world, and unhampered by traditions which have outworn their usefulness?"

Lord Dawson's eminence is not to be denied. But, with all due respect to his greatness as a physician, I am tempted to question the value of his evidence, especially when it is pitted against the experience of men and women who have lived a life of continence, without suffering any moral or physical harm. Physicians generally come across those who have so defied laws of health that they have contracted some illness. They, therefore, often successfully prescribe what sufferers should do to become well, but they cannot always know what healthy men and women can do in any particular direction. Lord Dawson's evidence, therefore, about the effect of continence on married people, has to be taken with the greatest caution. No doubt, the tendency among married people is to regard sexual satisfaction for itself as legitimate. But, in the modern age, in which nothing is taken for granted and everything is rightly scrutinized, it is surely wrong to take it for granted that because we have hitherto indulged in the sexual appetite in married life, the practice is either legitimate or healthy. Many old practices have been discontinued with good results. Why should

this particular practice be exempt from examination, especially in the light of those who, even as married men and women, are living a life of restraint with mutual benefit, both physical and moral?

But I object to contraceptives also on special grounds in India. Young men in India do not know what sexual restraint is. It is not their fault. They are married early. It is the custom. Nobody tells them to exercize restraint in married life. Parents are impatient to see grand-children. The poor girl-wives are expected by their surroundings to bear children as fast as they can. In such surroundings, the use of contraceptives can only further aggravate the mischief. The poor girls, who are expected to submit to their husbands' desire, are now to be taught that it is a good thing to desire sexual satisfaction without the desire to have children. And, in order to fulfil the double purpose, they are to have recourse to contraceptives.

I regard this to be the most pernicious education for married women. I do not believe that woman is prey to sexual desire to the same extent as man. It is easier for her than for man to exercize self-restraint. I hold that the right education in this country is to teach woman the art of saying 'no' even to her husband, to teach her that it is no part of her duty to become a mere tool or a doll in her husband's hands. She has rights as well as duties. Those who see in Sita a willing slave under Rama, do not realize the loftiness of either her independence or Rama's consideration for her in everything. Sita was no helpless weak woman, incapable of protecting herself or her honour. To ask India's women to take to contraceptives is, to say the least, putting the cart before the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her the sacredness of her body, and to teach her the dignity of national service and the service of humanity. It is not fair to assume that India's women are beyond redemption, and that they have, therefore, to be simply taught the use of contraceptives for the sake of

preventing births, and preserving such health as they may be in possession of.

Let not the sisters, who are rightly indignant over the miseries of women who are called upon to bear children, whether they will or no, be impatient. Not even the propaganda in favour of contraceptives is going to promote the desired end overnight. Every method is a matter of education. My plea is for the right type.

SELF-CONTROL AGAIN

"My plea based on positive experience is that even as truth and *ahimsa* are not merely for the chosen few, but for the whole of humanity to be practised in daily life, so exactly is self-control not for a few *Mahatmas* but for the whole of humanity."

"Your recent articles on self-control have created quite a stir. Persons who are in sympathy with your views find it difficult to exercize self-control for any length of time. They are arguing that you are applying your own experience and practice to the whole mankind. And even you have admitted that you do not fulfil the definition of a complete *brahmachari*. For, you yourself are not free from animal passion. And since you admit the necessity of limiting the number of children a married couple may have, the use of contraceptives is the only practicable method open to the vast majority of mankind."

I have admitted my own limitations. In this matter of self-control *vs.* contraceptives, they constitute my qualifications. For, my limitations show quite clearly that I am like the majority of earth earthy, and can have no pretensions to any extraordinary gifts. The motive for my self-control was also quite ordinary, *viz.*, the desire to limit the progeny for the purpose of serving the country or humanity. Inability to support a large family should be a greater incentive than the very distant one of serving one's country or humanity. That in spite of thirty-five years of successful (from the present stand-point) self-control, the animal in me still needs watching shows in an eminent degree that I am very much an ordinary mortal. I, therefore, do suggest that what has been possible for me is possible for any human being who would make the required effort.

My quarrel with the advocates of contraceptives lies in their taking it for granted that ordinary mortals

cannot exercize self-control. Some of them even go so far as to say that even if they can, they ought not to do so. To them, no matter how eminent they may be in their own spheres, I say, in all humility, but with utmost confidence, they are talking without experience of the possibilities of self-control. They have no *right* to limit the capacity of the human soul. In such instances, the positive evidence of one person like me, if it is reliable, is not only of greater value but decisive. To dismiss my evidence as useless, because I am popularly regarded as a *Mahatma*, is not proper in a serious inquiry.

Far more weighty is the argument of a sister, who says in effect: 'We, the advocates of contraceptives, have come on the scene only recently. You self-controllers had the field all to yourselves all these long generations, —may be, thousands of years. What have you to show to your credit? Has the world learnt the lesson of self-control? What have you done to stop the misery of over-burdened families? Have you heard the cry of wounded motherhood? Come, the field is even now open to you. We do not mind your advocacy of self-control. We may even wish you success, if perchance you save wives from the unwanted approaches of their husbands. But why should you seek to decry the methods which we employ, and which take note of, and make every allowance for, common human weaknesses or habits, and which, when properly employed, almost never fail to accomplish their purpose?'

The taunt is dictated by the anguish of a sister filled with compassion for the families that are always in want, because of the ever-increasing number of children. The appeal of human misery has been known to melt hearts of stone. How can it fail to affect high-souled sisters? But such appeals may easily lead one astray, if one is lifted off one's feet and, like a drowning man, catches any floating straw.

We are living in times when values are undergoing quick changes. We are not satisfied with slow results.

We are not satisfied with the welfare merely of our own caste-fellows, not even of our own country. We feel or want to feel for the whole of humanity. All this is a tremendous gain in humanity's march towards its goal.

But we won't find the remedy for human ills by losing patience, and by rejecting everything that is old because it is old. Our ancestors also dreamt, perhaps vaguely, the same dreams that fire us with zeal. The remedies they applied for similar ills, it is possible, are applicable even to the horizon that appears to have widened beyond expectations.

And my plea, based on positive experience, is that even as truth and *ahimsa* are not merely for the chosen few, but for the whole of humanity to be practised in daily life, so exactly is self-control not merely for a few *Mahatmas,* but for the whole of humanity. And even as because many people will be untruthful and violent, humanity may not lower its standard, so also though many, even the majority, may not respond to the message of self-control, we may not lower our standard.

A wise judge will not give a wrong decision in the face of a hard case. He will allow himself to appear to have hardened his heart, because he knows that truest mercy lies in not making bad law.

We may not attribute the weaknesses of the perishable body or the flesh to the imperishable soul that resides in it. We have to regulate the body in the light of the laws that govern the soul. In my humble opinion, these laws are few and unchangeable, capable of being understood and followed by the whole of the human family. There would be differences of degree but not of kind in their application. If we have faith, we won't lose it, because it may take a million years before humanity realizes or makes the nearest or visible approach to its goal. In Jawaharlal's language, let us have the correct ideology.

The sister's challenge, however, remains to be answered. The 'self-controllers' are not idle. They are

carrying on their propaganda. If their method is different in kind from the method of contraceptives, so is, and must be, their propaganda. 'Self-controllers' do not need clinics, they cannot advertize their cure for the simple reason that it is not an article to be sold or given. But their criticizm of contraceptives, and warning to the people against their use, is part of their propaganda. The constructive side has always been there, but naturally in an unfelt and unseen manner. Advocacy of self-control has never been suspended. The most effective is that of example. The larger the number of honest persons who practise successful self-control, the more effective becomes the propaganda.

MARRIED BRAHMACHARYA

"The scaling of the Himalayas can, at best, give a temporary feeling of elation and triumph. But the reward of the conquest of self is a spiritual bliss that knows no waning, and grows ever more and more."

A friend writes:

"I have long since held with you that self-control is the only sovereign method for attaining birth-control. That the sexual act is meant for procreation only, and apart from it, in any shape or form, would amount to unnatural gratification or lust, needs no proof. But sometimes this brings one up against a grave dilemma. Supposing that the sexual act, once or twice, fails to lead to conception, what is one to do then? Where is one to draw the limit? It is hard, finally, to give up all hope of begetting offspring. On the other hand, unlimited indulgence in the sexual act must result in the man being drained of all vitality. Again, should such a person be told to regard his failure to beget progeny on the first or the second chance, as a mark of adverse fate and on that score to abstain from having any further intercourse thereafter? But that would require an exceptional degree of self-possession and spiritual strength on the part of the person concerned. Instances of people begetting progeny in their declining years, after repeated failure during the years of manhood and youth, are by no means either unknown or rare. That makes the observance of complete abstinence still more difficult, and the position becomes further complicated when the parties happen to be otherwise healthy and free from any physical defect."

I admit the difficulty but the difficulty is inherent in the problem itself. The road to any progress is strewn with such difficulty, and the story of man's ascent in the scale of evolution is co-extensive with the history of the successful overcoming of these difficulties. Take the story of the attempts to conquer the Himalayas. The higher you go, the steeper becomes the climb, the more

difficult the ascent, so much so that its highest peak still remains unvanquished. The enterprise has already exacted a heavy toll of sacrifice. Yet every year sees fresh attempts made, only to end in failure like their predecessors. All that has, however, failed to damp the spirit of the explorers. If that is the case with the conquest of the Himalayas, what about the conquest of self, which is a harder job by far, even as the reward is richer? The scaling of the Himalayas can, at best, give a temporary feeling of elation and triumph. But the reward of the conquest of self is a spiritual bliss that knows no waning, and grows ever more and more. It is a well-known maxim of the science of *brahmacharya* that insemination, in the case of a man who has properly kept the rules of *brahmacharya*, cannot, ought not to, fail to lead to conception. And this is just as it should be. When a man has completely conquered his animality, involuntary incontinence becomes impossible, and the desire for sexual gratification for its own sake ceases altogether. Sexual union, then, takes place only when there is a desire for offspring. This is the meaning of what has been described as *Married Brahmacharya*. In other words, a person who obeys this rule, though leading a married life, attains the same state as, and is equal in merit to, one who completely abstains from the sexual act, which is only a means for procreation never for self-indulgence. In practice, it is true, this ideal is seen to be rarely realized in its completeness. But in shaping our ideals we cannot think in terms of our weaknesses or the possible lapses. The present tendency, however, is to take a complete swing around and the protagonists of contraceptives have almost set up self-indulgence as their ideal. Self-indulgence obviously can never be an ideal. There can be no limit to the practice of an ideal. But unlimited self-indulgence, as everybody would admit, can only result in certain destruction of the individual or the race concerned. Hence, self-control alone can be our ideal and it has been so regarded from the earliest times. Therefore, we have to explore the

means of its attainment, not to circumvent it.

It has become my settled conviction that most of the difficulties that are experienced in connection with the practice of *brahmacharya* are due to our ignorance about its laws, and would of themselves disappear if we discovered them. Let us, for instance, examine the poser propounded by our correspondent in the ideal light. In the ideal state, in the first place, such a contingency will never arise, because in a normally healthy couple, who have from their childhood upward observed the rules of *brahmacharya*, sexual union can never prove infertile. In practice, however, anomalies do arise. The only rule that can be laid down in such instances is that the coitus may be permitted once at the end of the monthly period till conception is established. If its object is achieved, it must be abjured forthwith, for mere sensual gratification should never be its object. It is my faith based on my experience that bodily and mental health increases in the same ratio as bodily and mental chastity. Nor is it to be wondered at. A substance, that is capable of producing such a wonderful being as man, cannot but, when properly conserved, be transmuted into matchless energy and strength. Anyone can test for himself the truth of this observation of the *Shastras* by personal experience. And the rule holds good in respect of woman no less than man. The real difficulty, however, is that we vainly expect to be free from outward manifestations of lust, while harbouring it in our minds, with the result that physically and mentally we become utter wrecks, and our lives, in the words of Gita, become a living lie or hypocrisy personified.

A MORAL DILEMMA

"Marriage taboos are not universal and are largely based on social usage. The usage varies from province to province, and as between different divisions. This does not mean that the youth may ride roughshod over all established social customs and inhibitions."

A friend writes:

"About two and a half years ago, this city was convulsed by a social tragedy. A Vaishya gentleman had a sixteen years old daughter. She had a maternal uncle, aged twenty-one years, studying in college in the same city. The two fell secretly into love with each other. The girl is said to have become pregnant. When the true state of affairs at last became known, the lovers committed suicide by taking poison. The girl died immediately, but the boy died a couple of days afterwards in the hospital. The incident raised a storm of controversy and set all tongues wagging, so much so, that it became difficult for the bereaved parents of the hapless girl to dwell in the city. In the course of time, the storm blew over. But the memory of the event still lingers in the people's minds, and is raked up every now and then whenever a similar topic arises. At the time, when the storm was at its height and nobody had a kind word to say about the deceased unfortunate lovers, I shocked everybody by expressing my opinion that under the afore-mentioned circumstances the young lovers ought to have been allowed to have their way. But mine remained a voice in the wilderness. What is your opinion in the matter?"

I have deliberately kept back the name of the correspondent and the place at the request of the writer, as he did not want old sores to be re-opened by a revival of an old controversy. All the same, I feel that a public discussion of this delicate topic is necessary. In my opinion, such marriages, as are interdicted in a particular society, cannot be recognized all at once or at the will of

an individual. Nor has society, or relatives of parties concerned, any right to impose their will upon and forcibly curtail the liberty of action of the young people, who may want to contract such marriages. In the instance, cited by the correspondent, both the parties had fully attained maturity. They could well think for themselves. No one had a right forcibly to prevent them from marrying each other, if they wanted to. Society could, at the most, refuse to recognize the marriage, but it was the height of tyranny to drive them to suicide.

Marriage taboos are not universal and are largely based on social usage. The usage varies from province to province and as between different divisions. This does not mean that the youth may ride roughshod over all established social customs and inhibitions. Before they decide to do so, they must convert public opinion to their side. In the meantime, the individuals concerned ought patiently to bide their time, or, if they cannot do that, calmly and quietly to face the consequences of social ostracizm.

At the same time, it is equally the duty of society not to take up a heartless step-motherly attitude towards those who might disregard or break the established conventions. In the instance, described by my correspondent, the guilt of driving the young couple to suicide certainly rests on the shoulders of society, if the version that is before me is correct.

THE MARRIAGE IDEAL

"The ideal of absolute *brahmacharya* or of married *brahmacharya* is for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life; it is the *sine qua non* of such life."

A friend writes:

"In the current issue of *Harijan Sevak*, in your article entitled *A Moral Dilemma*, you have observed: 'Many marriage taboos appear to have grown out of social customs. They are nowhere seen to rest on any vital, moral or religious principle.' My own instinct, based upon my experience, tells me that probably these taboos were promulgated out of eugenic considerations. It is a well-known principle of the science of eugenics, that the issue resulting from the crossing of exogamous elements is eugenically fitter than the product of endogamous unions. That is the reason why in Hinduism *Sagotra* (सगोत्र) and *Sapinda* (सपिण्ड) marriages are interdicted. On the other hand, if we admit social custom, with all its kaleidoscopic variety and change, to be the sole reason for these taboos, we are left with no strong reason why marriages between paternal uncle and niece, or, for matter of that, between brother and sister, should absolutely be tabooed. If, as you say, the begetting of progeny be the only legitimate object of marriage, then, the choice of partners would become purely a question of eugenic harmony. Are all other considerations to be ruled out of court as relatively unimportant? If not, what would be their order of precedence? I would set it down as follows:

1. Mutual attraction or love;
2. Eugenic fitness;
3. Approval and consent of the respective families concerned; and consideration for the interest of the social order to which one belongs;
4. Spiritual development.

What do *you* say to it?

"The Hindu *Shastras* have emphatically set down procreation as the sole end of marriage, as the ancient benediction that is pro-

nounced upon the prospective housewife by her elders at the time of marriage *viz.*, 'May you be blessed with eight children', shows. This bears out your contention that co-habitation in marriage should only be for the purpose of begetting offspring, never for sensual gratification. But, then, would you expect a married couple to be satisfied with only one offspring, irrespective of whether it is male or female? Besides the longing to perpetuate one's line, which you have very properly recognised, there also has existed amongst us a strong feeling that this can be properly done only through a male issue. And the birth of a girl, therefore, is less welcome than that of a boy. In view of this very widespread craving for a male issue, don't you think that your ideal of having only one offspring should be modified, so as to include the begetting of a male issue in addition to the possible female ones?

"I entirely agree with you that a married person, who confines the sex act strictly to the purpose of procreation, should be regarded as a *brahmachari*. I also hold with you that in the case of a married couple, who have practised the rule of purity and self-control before and after marriage, a single act of union must lead to conception. In support of your first point, there is in our *Shastras* the celebrated story of Vishvamitra and Arundhati, the wife of Vasishtha, who in spite of her one hundred sons was greeted by Visvamitra as a perfect *brahmacharini*, whose command even the elements were bound to obey, because her connubial relations with her husband were purely directed to the attainment and discharge of the function of motherhood. But I doubt whether even the Hindu *Shastras* would support your ideal of having only one offspring, irrespective of whether it is male or female. It seems to me, therefore, that if you liberalise your ideal of married life, so as to include the begetting of one male offspring in addition to the possible female ones, it would go a long way towards satisfying many married couples. Otherwise, I am afraid, most people would find it to be harder to limit sexual relationship to the procreation of the first child, and, then, irrespective of its sex, practise complete abstention for the rest of life than never to marry at all. I am being slowly forced to the view that sexuality is man's primitive nature, self-control is a cultivated virtue, representing a step in his upward evolution towards religion and spirituality, which is the natural law of his development. That is why self-control has been held in such high regard. I honour the person who lives up to the ideal of regarding sexual union only as a means of procreation. I also agree that coming together under any circumstance would be sensual indulgence. But I am not prepared to

condemn it as a heinous sin, or to regard husband and wife, who cannot help their nature, as fallen creatures to be treated with cheap pity or high-brow contempt."

I do not know what the scientific basis for the various taboos in respect of marriage relationship is. But it seems to me clear that a social custom or usage, that helps the practice of virtue and self-control, should have the sanctity of moral law. If it is eugenic considerations that are at the root of interdiction of marriages between brother and sister, then, they ought to apply equally to cousin-marriages. A safe rule of conduct, therefore, would be, as a rule, to respect such taboos where they exist in a particular society. I accept generally the conditions for an ideal marriage, enumerated by my correspondent. But I would change their order of importance and put 'love' last in the list. By giving it the first place, the other conditions are liable to be overshadowed by it altogether, and rendered more or less nugatory. Therefore, spiritual development ought to be given the first place in the choice for marriage. Service should come next, family considerations and the interest of the social order should have the third place, and mutual attraction or 'love' the fourth and the last place. This means that 'love' alone, where the other four conditions are not fulfilled, should not be held as a valid reason for marriage. At the same time, marriage, where there is no love, should equally be ruled out even though all the other conditions are fully complied with. I should score out the condition of eugenic fitness, because the begetting of offspring being the central purpose of marriage, eugenic fitness cannot be treated merely as a 'condition', it is the *sine qua non* of marriage.

Hindu *Shastras* certainly show a marked bias in favour of the male offspring. But this originated at a time when physical warfare was the order of the day, and adequate man-power was a *sine qua non* of success in the struggle for existence. The number of sons that a man had was, therefore, then looked upon as a mark of virility and strength,

and to facilitate the begetting of a numerous offspring, even polygamy was sanctioned and encouraged. But if we regard marriage as a sacrament, there is room in it only for one offspring, and that is why in our *Shastras* the first offspring is described as धर्मज *i.e.*, 'duty-born', all subsequent issues being referred to as कामज *i.e.*, 'lust-born'. I make no distinction between son and daughter. Such distinction is, in my opinion, invidious and wrong. The birth of a son or a daughter should be welcome alike.

The story of Vishvamitra and Vasistha is good as an illustration of the principle that the sexual act, performed solely for the purpose of begetting offspring, is not inconsistent with the highest ideal of *brahmacharya*. But the whole of that story need not be taken literally. Sexual intercourse, for the purpose of carnal satisfaction, is reversion to animality, and it should, therefore, be man's endeavour to rise above it. But failure to do so between husband and wife cannot be regarded as a sin or a matter of obloquy. Millions in this world eat for the satisfaction of their palate; similarly, millions of the husbands and wives indulge in the sex act for their carnal satisfaction and will continue to do so, and also pay the inexorable penalty in the shape of numberless ills with which nature visits all violations of its order. The ideal of absolute *brahmacharya*, or of married *brahmacharya*, is for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life; it is the *sine qua non* of such life.

7

OBSCENE ADVERTISEMENTS

"Would that woman will realize the power she has latent in her for good, if she has also for mischief. It is in her power to make the world more livable both for her and her partner, whether as father, son or husband, if she would cease to think of herself as weak, and fit only to serve as a doll for man to play with."

A sister, sending me a cutting from a well-known magazine containing the advertisement of a most objectionable book, writes:

"The enclosed came under my eye when glancing over the pages of......I do not know if you get this magazine. I do not suppose you ever have time to glance at it, even if it is sent to you. Once before, I spoke to you about 'obscene advertisements.' I do so wish, you would write about them sometime. That books of the type advertised are flooding the market to-day is only too true, but should responsible journals like......encourage their sale? My woman's modesty is so utterly repelled by these things, that I cannot write to anyone but to you. To think that what God has given to woman with intent for an express purpose, should be advertised for abuse is too degrading for words......I wish you would write about the responsibility of leading Indian newspapers and journals in this respect. This is not the first, by any means, that I could have sent to you for criticizm."

From the advertisement I do not propose to reproduce any portion, except to tell the reader that it describes as obscenely as it can the suggestive contents of the book advertised. Its title is: *Sexual Beauty of the Female Form,* and the advertising firm tells the reader that it will give away free to the buyer two more books called: *New Knowledge for the Bride,* and *The Sexual Embrace or How to Please Your Partner.*

I fear, that in relying on me in any way to affect the

course of the advertisers of such books, or to move the editors or publishers from their purpose of making their productions yield profits, she relies on a broken reed. No amount of appealing by me to the publishers of the objectionable books, or advertisements of them, will be of any use. But what I would like to tell the writer of the letter, and other learned sisters like her, is to come out in the open and to do the work that is peculiarly and specially theirs. Very often a bad name is given to a person, and he or she in course of time begins to believe in the badness. To call a woman a member of 'the weaker sex' is a libel. In what way is woman the weaker sex, I do not know. If the implication is that she lacks the brute instinct of man, or does not possess it in the same measure as man, the charge may be admitted. But, then, woman becomes, as she is, the nobler sex. If she is weak in striking, she is strong in suffering. I have described woman as the embodiment of sacrifice and *ahimsa*. She has to learn not to rely on man to protect her virtue or her honour. I do not know a single instance of a man having ever protected the virtue of a woman. He cannot, even if he would. Rama certainly did not protect the virtue of Sita, nor the five Pandavas of Draupadi. Both these noble women protected their own virtue by the sheer force of their purity. No person loses honour or self-respect but by his consent. A woman no more loses her honour or virtue, because a brute renders her senseless and ravishes her, than a man loses his because a wicked woman administers to him a stupefying drug and makes him do what she likes.

It is remarkable that there are no books written in praise of male beauty. But why should there always be literature to excite the animal passions of man? May it be, that woman likes to live up to the titles that man has chosen to bestow upon her? Does she like to have the beauty of her form exploited by man? Does she like to look beautiful of form before man, and why? These are questions I would like educated sisters to ask them-

selves. If these advertisements and literature offend them, they must wage a relentless war against them, and they will stop them in a moment. Would that woman will realize the power she has latent in her for good, if she has also for mischief. It is in her power to make the world more livable both for her and her partner, whether as father, son or husband, if she would cease to think of herself as weak, and fit only to serve as a doll for man to play with. If society is not to be destroyed by insane wars of nations against nations, and still more insane wars on its moral foundations, the woman will have to play her part, not manfully, as some are trying to do, but womanfully. She won't better humanity by vying with man in his ability to destroy life, mostly without purpose. Let it be her privilege to wean the erring man from his error, which will envelop in his ruin that of woman also. This wretched advertisement is merely a straw showing which way the wind is blowing. It is a shameless exploitation of woman. It would not leave alone even 'the beauty of female form of savage races of the world.'

WRONG APOTHEOSIS OF WOMEN

"Before you put your pens to paper, think of woman as your own mother, and I assure you the chastest literature will flow from your pens, even like the beautiful rain from heaven which waters the thirsty earth below."

On the occasion of the Gujarati Literary Conference at Ahmedabad, a letter was addressed to Gandhiji by the ladies in charge of a woman's movement called Joyti Sangh. The letter enclosed a copy of a resolution they had passed, condemning the present-day tendencies in literature regarding the presentation of women. There was, Gandhiji felt, considerable force in the complaint, and he said:

The gravamen of their charge is that the present-day writers give an entirely false picture of women. They are exasperated at the sickly sentimentality with which you delineate them, at the vulgar way in which you dwell on their physical form. Does all their beauty and their strength lie in their physical form, in their capacity to please the lustful eye of men? Why, the writers of the letter justly ask, should we be eternally represented as meek, submissive women for whom all the menial jobs of the household are reserved, and whose only deities are their husbands? Why are they not delineated as they really are? We are, they say, neither etherial damsels, nor dolls, nor bundles of passions and nerves. We are as much human beings as men are, and we are filled with the same urge for freedom. I claim to know them and their mind sufficiently well. There was a time in South Africa when I was surrounded by numerous women, all their menfolk having gone to jails. There were some sixty inmates and I had become the brother and father of all the girls and women. Let me tell you that they grew in strength

and spirit under me, so much so that they ultimately marched to jails themselves.

I am told that our literature is full of even an exaggerated apotheosis of women. Let me say that it is an altogether wrong apotheosis. Let me place one simple test before you. In what light do you think of them when you proceed to write about them? I suggest that before you put your pens to paper, think of woman as your own mother, and I assure you the chastest literature will flow from your pens, even like the beautiful rain from heaven which waters the thirsty earth below. Remember that a woman was your mother, before a woman became your wife. Far from quenching their spiritual thirst, some writers stimulate their passions, so much so that poor ignorant women waste their time wondering how they might answer to the description our fiction gives of them. Are detailed descriptions of their physical form an essential part of literature, I wonder? Do you find anything of the kind in the Upanishads, the Quran or the Bible? And yet, do you know that the English language would be empty without the Bible? Three parts Bible, and one part Shakespeare is the description of it. Arabic would be forgotten without the Quran. And, think of Hindi without Tulsidas! Do you find in it anything like what you find in the present-day literature about women?

STUDENTS' SHAME

"I have a fear that the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. She loves adventure...She dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun, but to attract attention. She improves upon Nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls."

There is a most pathetic letter from a college girl in the Punjab lying on my file for nearly two months. Want of time was but an excuse for shirking the answer to the girl's question. Somehow or other, I was avoiding the task, though I knew the answer. Meanwhile, I received another letter from a sister of great experience, and I felt that I could no longer evade the duty of dealing with the college girl's very real difficulty. Her letter is written in chaste Hindustani. I must try to do as much justice as I can to the letter, which gives me a perfect picture of her deep feeling. Here is my rendering of a portion of the letter:

"To girls and grown-up women there come times, in spite of their wish to the contrary, when they have to venture out alone, whether they are going from one place to another in the same city, or from one town to another. And when they are thus found alone, evil-minded people pester them. They use improper or even indecent language, whilst they are passing by. And if fear does not check them, they do not hesitate to take further liberty. I should like to know what part non-violence can play on such occasions. The use of violence is, of course, there. If the girl or the woman has sufficient courage, she will use what resources she has and teach miscreants a lesson. They can, at least, kick up a row that would draw the attention of the people around, resulting in the miscreants being horse-whipped. But I know that the result of such treatment would be merely to postpone the agony, not a permanent cure. Where you know

the people who misbehave, I feel sure that they will listen to reason, to the gesture of love and humility. But what about a fellow cycling by, using foul language on seeing a girl or a woman unaccompanied by a male companion? You have no opportunity of reasoning with him. There is no likelihood of your meeting him again. You may not even recognize him. You do not know his address. What is a poor girl or a woman to do in such cases! By way of example, I want to give you my own experience of last night 26th October. I was going with a girl companion of mine, on a very special errand, at about 7-30 P.M. It was impossible to secure a male companion at the time, and the errand could not be put off. On the way, a Sikh young man passed by on his cycle, and continued to murmur something till we were within hearing distance. We knew that it was aimed at us. We felt hurt and uneasy. There was no crowd on the road. Before we had gone a few paces, the cyclist returned. We recognized him at once whilst he was still at a respectful distance. He wheeled towards us, heaven knows whether he had intended to get down or merely pass by us. We felt that we were in danger. We had no faith in our physical prowess. I myself am weaker than the average girl. But in my hands I had a big book. Somehow or other, courage came to me all of a sudden. I hurled the heavy book at the cycle and roared out; 'Dare you repeat your pranks?' He could with difficulty keep his balance, put on speed and fled from us. Now, if I had not flung the book at his cycle, he might have harassed us by his filthy language to the end of our journey. This was an ordinary, perhaps, insignificant occurrence; but I wish you could come to Lahore and listen to the difficulties of us, unfortunate girls. You would surely discover a proper solution. First of all, tell me how, in the circumstances mentioned above, can girls apply the principle of *ahimsa* and save themselves. Secondly, what is the remedy for curing youth of the abominable habit of insulting womenfolk? You would not suggest that we should wait and suffer till a new generation, taught from the childhood to be polite to their womenfolk, comes into being. The government is either unwilling or unable to deal with this social evil. The big leaders have no time for questions. Some, when they hear of a girl bravely castigating ill-behaved youth, say: 'Well done. That is the way all girls should behave.' Sometimes, a leader is found eloquently lecturing against such misbehaviour of students. But no one applies himself continuously to the solution of this serious problem. You will be painfully surprised to know that during Diwali, and such other holidays, newspapers come out with notices warning women from ven-

turing outdoors even to see the illuminations. This one fact should enable you to know to what straits we are reduced in this part of the world. Neither the writers nor the readers of such warnings have any sense of shame that they should have to be issued."

Another Punjabi girl, to whom I gave the letter to read, supports the narrative from her own experience of her college days, and tells me that what my correspondent has related is the common experience of most girls.

The other letter from an experienced woman relates the experiences of her girl friend in Lucknow. They are molested in cinema theatres by boys sitting in the row behind them, using all kinds of language which I can only call indecent. They are stated to resort even to practical jokes, which have been described by my correspondent but which I must not reproduce here.

If the immediate personal relief was all that was needed, no doubt the remedy that the girl who describes herself to be physically weak adopted, *i.e.*, of flinging her book at the cyclist, was quite correct. It is an age-long remedy. And I have said in these columns that when a person wants to become violent, physical weakness does not come in the way of its effective use, even against a physically powerful opponent. And we know that in the present age there have been invented so many methods of using physical force, that even a little girl with sufficient intelligence can deal death and destruction. The fashion now-a-days is growing of training girls to defend themselves in situations such as the one described by my correspondent. But she is wise enough to know that even though she was able to make effective use for the moment of the book she had in her hand as a weapon of defence, it was no remedy for the growing evil. In the cases of rude remarks, there need be no perturbation, but there should be no indifference. All such cases should be published in the papers. Names of the offenders should be published when they are traced. There should be no false modesty about exposing the

evil. There is nothing like public opinion for castigating public misconduct. There is no doubt that, as the correspondent says, there is great public apathy about such matters. But it is not the public alone that are to blame. They must have before them examples of rudeness. Even as stealing cannot be dealt with unless cases of thieving are published and followed up, so also it is impossible to deal with cases of rude behaviour if they are suppressed. Crime and vice generally require darkness for prowling. They disappear when light plays upon them.

But I have a fear that the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. She loves adventure. My correspondent seems to represent the unusual type. The modern girl dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun, but to attract attention. She improves upon Nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls. I have often remarked in these columns that definite rules govern the development of the non-violent spirit in us. It is a strenuous effort. It makes a revolution in the way of thinking and living. If my correspondent, and the girls of her way of thinking, will revolutionize their life in the prescribed manner, they will soon find that young men, who at all come in contact with them, will learn to respect them and to put on their best behaviour in their presence. But if, perchance, they find, as they may, that their very chastity is in danger of being violated, they must develop courage enough to die rather than yield to the brute in man. It has been suggested that a girl, who is gagged or bound so as to make her powerless even for struggling, cannot die as easily as I seem to think. I venture to assert that a girl who has the will to resist can burst all the bonds that may have been used to render her powerless. The resolute will gives her the strength to die.

But this heroism is possible only for those who have trained themselves for it. Those who have not a living faith in non-violence will learn the art of ordinary self-

defence, and protect themselves from indecent behaviour of unchivalrous youth.

The great question, however, is why should young men be devoid of elementary good manners so as to make decent girls be in perpetual fear of molestation from them? I should be sorry to discover that the majority of young men have lost all sense of chivalry. But they should, as a class, be jealous of their reputation and deal with every case of impropriety occurring among their mates. They must learn to hold the honour of every woman as dear as that of their own sisters and mothers. All the education they receive will be in vain if they do not learn good manners.

And, is it not as much the concern of professors and schoolmasters to ensure gentlemanliness among their pupils, as to prepare them for the subjects prescribed for the class-room?

THE MODERN GIRL

"The modern girl has a special meaning...But all the girls who receive English education are not modern girls. I know many who are not at all touched by the 'modern girl' spirit. But there are some who have become modern girls."

I have received a letter, written on behalf of eleven girls, whose names and addresses have been sent to me. I give it below, with changes that make it more readable, without in any way altering the meaning:

"Your comments on the letter of a lady student captioned *Students' Shame* and published in *Harijan* of the 31st December, 1938, deserve special attention. The modern girl, it seems, has provoked you to the extent that you have disposed of her finally as one playing Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. This remark, which betrays your idea about women in general, is not very inspiring.

"In these days when women are coming out of closed doors to help men and take an equal share of the burden of life, it is indeed strange that they are still blamed even when they are maltreated by men. It cannot be denied that instances can be cited where the fault is equally divided. There may be a few girls playing Juliets to half a dozen Romeos. But such cases presuppose the existence of half a dozen Romeos moving about the streets in quest of a Juliet. And, it cannot or should never be taken that modern girls are categorically all Juliets, or modern youths all Romeos. You yourself have come in contact with quite a number of modern girls, and may have been struck by their resolution, sacrifice and other sterling womanly virtues.

"As for forming public opinion against such misdemeanours, as pointed out by your correspondent, it is not for girls to do it, not so much out of false shame as from its ineffectiveness.

"But a statement like this from one revered all over the world seems to hold a brief once more for that worn-out and unbecoming saying: 'Woman is the Gate of Hell.'

"From the foregoing remarks, however, please do not conclude that modern girls have no respect for you. They hold you in

as much respect as every young man does. To be hated or pitied is what they resent much. They are ready to mend their ways if they are really guilty. Their guilt, if any, must be conclusively proved before they are anathematized. In this respect, they would neither desire to take shelter under the covering of 'ladies, please,' nor would they silently stand and allow the judge to condemn them in his own way. Truth must be faced; the modern girl or 'Juliet,' as you have called her, has courage enough to face it."

My correspondents do not, perhaps, know that I began service of India's women in South Africa more than forty years ago, when perhaps none of them was born. I hold myself to be incapable of writing anything derogatory to womanhood. My regard for the fair sex is too great to permit me to think ill of them. She is, what she has been described to be in English, the better half of mankind. And my article was written to expose students' shame, not to advertise the frailties of girls. But, in giving the diagnosis of the disease, I was bound, if I was to prescribe the right remedy, to mention all the factors which induced the disease.

The modern girl has a special meaning. Therefore, there was no question of my restricting the scope of my remark to some. But all the girls who receive English education are not modern girls. I know many who are not at all touched by the 'modern girl' spirit. But there are some who have become modern girls. My remark was meant to warn India's girl students against copying the modern girl, and complicating a problem that has become a serious menace. For, at the time I received the letter referred to, I received also a letter from an Andhra girl student, bitterly complaining of the behaviour of Andhra students, which, from the description given, is worse than what was described by the Lahore girl. This daughter of Andhra tells me, the simple dress of her girl friends gives them no protection, but they lack the courage to expose the barbarism of the boys, who are a disgrace to the institution they belong to. I commend

this complaint to the authorities of the Andhra University.

The eleven girls I invite to initiate a crusade against the rude behaviour of students. God helps only those who help themselves. The girls must learn the art of protecting themselves against the ruffianly behaviour of man.

A SISTER'S QUESTIONS

"Where there is a non-violent atmosphere, where there is the constant teaching of *ahimsa*, woman will not regard herself as dependent, weak or helpless. She is not really helpless when she is really pure. Her purity makes her conscious of her strength."

Q. How is one to protect the honour of women?

A. The question may be discussed under two heads: (1) how is a woman to protect her own honour? and (2) how are her male relatives to protect it?

As regards the first question, where there is a non-violent atmosphere, where there is the constant teaching of *ahimsa*, woman will not regard herself as dependent, weak or helpless. She is not really helpless when she is really pure. Her purity makes her conscious of her strength. I have always held that it is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear, or does not realize her moral strength. If she cannot meet the assailant's physical might, her purity will give her the strength to die before he succeeds in violating her. Take the case of Sita. Physically she was a weakling before Ravana, but her purity was more than a match even for his giant might. He tried to win her with all kinds of allurements, but could not carnally touch her without her consent. On the other hand, if a woman depends on her own physical strength, or upon a weapon she possesses, she is sure to be discomfited whenever her strength is exhausted.

The second question is easily answered. The brother or father or friend will stand between his protege and her assailant. He will, then, either dissuade the assailant from his wicked purpose, or allow himself to be killed by him

in preventing him. In so laying down his life, he will not only have done his duty, but given a new accession of strength to his protege who will now know how to protect her honour.

Q. But there lies the rub. How is a woman to lay down her life? Is it possible for her to do so?

A. Oh! any day more possible for her than for man. I know that women are capable of throwing away their lives for a much lesser purpose. Only a few days ago, a young girl of twenty burnt herself to death as she felt she was being persecuted for refusing to go in for ordinary studies. And, she perished with such cool courage and determination. She ignited her *sari* with an ordinary oil-light, and did not so much as raise a cry, so that the people in the neighbouring room were unaware of the happening until all was over. I do not give these details to commend her example, but to show how easily woman can throw away her life. I, at any rate, am incapable of this courage. But I agree that it is not the external light but the inner light that is needed.

Q. How one is to avoid anger and violence altogether in dealing with children?

A. You know our old adage: 'Play with him till he is five, hammer him for ten years, treat him as your friend when he is sixteen.' But, don't you worry. If you have to be angry with your child on occasions, I shall call that anger non-violent anger. I am speaking of wise mothers, not the ignorant ones who do not deserve to be mothers.

A RENUNCIATION

"Innocent youth is a priceless possession, not to be squandered away for the sake of a momentary excitement, mis-called pleasure. Let the weak girls be strong enough to resist the approaches, though they may be declared to be innocent, of young men who are either knaves or who do not know what they are doing."

In 1891, after my return from England, I virtually took charge of the children of the family and introduced the habit of walking with them—boys and girls—putting my hands on their shoulders. These were my brothers' children. The practice continued even after they grew old. With the extension of the family, it gradually grew to proportions sufficient to attract attention.

I was unconscious of doing any wrong, so far as I can recollect, till some years ago at Sabarmati an inmate of the *Ashrama* told me that my practice, when extended to grown-up girls and women, offended the accepted notions of decency. But after discussion with the inmates, it was continued. Recently, two co-workers who came to Wardha suggested that the practice was likely to set a bad example to others, and that I should discontinue it on that account. Their argument did not appeal to me. Nevertheless, I did not want to ignore the friends' warning. I, therefore, referred it for examination and advice to five inmates of the *Ashrama*. Whilst it was taking shape, a decisive event took place. It was brought to my notice that a bright university student was taking all sorts of liberties in private with a girl who was under his influence, on the plea that he loved her like his own sister and could not restrain himself from some physical demonstration of it. He resented the slightest suggestion of impurity. Could I mention what the youth had

been doing, the reader would unhesitatingly pronounce the liberties taken by him as impure. When I read the correspondence, I and those who saw it came to the conclusion that either the young man was a consummate hypocrite or was self-deluded.

Anyway, the discovery set me athinking. I recalled the warning of the two co-workers and asked myself how I would feel, if I found that the young man was using my practice in his defence. I may mention that the girl, who is the victim of the youth's attentions, although she regards him as absolutely pure and brotherly, does not like them, even protests against them, but is too weak to resist his action. The self-introspection induced by the event resulted, within two or three days of the reading of the correspondence, in the renunciation of the practice, and I announced it to the inmates of the *Wardha Ashrama* on the 12th instant. It was not without a pang that I came to the decision. Never has an impure thought entered my being during or owing to the practice. My act has always been open. I believe that my act was that of a parent and had enabled the numerous girls under my guidance and wardship to give their confidences, which, perhaps, no one else has enjoyed in the same measure. Whilst I do not believe in a *brahmacharya* which ever requires a wall of protection against the touch of the opposite sex, and will fail if exposed to the least temptation, I am not unaware of the dangers attendant upon the freedom I have taken.

The discovery quoted by me has, therefore, prompted me to renounce the practice, however pure it may have been in itself. Every act of mine is scrutinized by thousands of men and women, as I am conducting an experiment requiring ceaseless vigilance. I must avoid doing things which may require a reasoned defence. My example was never meant to be followed by all and sundry. The young man's case has come upon me as a warning. I have taken it in the hope that my renunciation will set right those who may have erred, whether under the in-

fluence of my example or without it. Innocent youth is a priceless possession, not to be squandered away for the sake of a momentary excitement, miscalled pleasure. And let the weak girls, like the one in this picture, be strong enough to resist the approaches, though they may be declared to be innocent, of young men who are either knaves or who do not know what they are doing.

BE SISTERS OF MERCY

> "Your parents do not send you to school to become dolls; on the contrary, you are expected to become Sisters of Mercy. ...She becomes a Sister of Mercy immediately she thinks less of herself, and more of those who are poorer and more unfortunate than herself."

Gandhiji

Speaking at the Udivil Girls' College in Jaffna, Gandhiji said:

It has given me very great pleasure, indeed, to meet you this morning. I do not at all appreciate the idea of your little gifts, which have come right from the bottom of your hearts, having been merged in the general purse, but I am going to put the best construction possible upon the fact of your purse having been merged in the general purse; you, being more modest than boys, do not want me to know that you had given anything at all, but having met thousands or tens of thousands of girls throughout India, it is difficult for girls now-a-days to hide from me any good things that they may do.

Now, there are some girls who do not mind even telling me the bad things that they do. Let me hope that of all these girls before me, there is not one single girl who does a bad thing. Not having the time to cross-examine you, I am not going to weary you with questions, but if there are any girls in our midst who do bad things, I would fain let them know that, if that is the case, their education is useless.

Your parents do not send you to school to become dolls; on the contrary, you are expected to become Sisters of Mercy. Do not make the mistake of thinking that only those may be called Sisters of Mercy, who wear a particular dress. She becomes a Sister of Mercy imme-

diately she thinks less of herself, and more of those who are poorer and more unfortunate than herself. And you have done the work of Sisters of Mercy in giving your mite to the purse that has been presented to me, because that purse has been presented for those who are unfortunately poorer than yourselves.

To give a little bit of money is easy enough, to do a little thing oneself is more difficult. If you really feel for the people for whom you are giving money, you must go a step further and wear *khadi* that these people manufacture. If, when *khadi* is brought before you, you say: '*Khadi* is a bit coarse, we cannot wear it', then, I know you have not the spirit of self-sacrifice in you.

It is such a very nice thing that here there is no distinction between high class and low class, touchables and untouchables; and if your hearts are also working in that direction, and you do not consider yourselves superior to some other girls, it is a very good thing indeed.

May God bless you !

ADVICE TO GIRL STUDENTS

> "Every girl, every Indian girl, is not born to marry. I can show many girls who are to-day dedicating themselves to service, instead of serving one man. It is high time that the Hindu girls produce or reproduce an edition, and, if possible, a glorified edition of Parvati and Sita."

In his speech at Ramanathan Girls' College in Jaffna, Gandhiji said:

It has, indeed, given me great joy to be able to come here this morning, as if to put a finishing touch to the whole round of visits to different scholastic institutions in Jaffna.

Your promise in your address, that you are going to observe this day as an annual function and devote it to collections for *khadi* work, has touched me to the core. I know that this is no idle promise on your part, but that you are going to fulfil that promise religiously. If the famishing millions, on whose behalf I am touring, could possibly understand this determination on the part of their sisters, I know it would gladden their hearts, but you will be pained to be informed by me that these dumb millions, in whose behalf you have given me this purse—and so many purses have been given in Ceylon—would not even understand such things, if I attempted to tell them. No description, that I can give you of their miserable life, can possibly give you a proper perspective of what that position means.

This immediately brings me to the question—what are you to do for these and such other people? It is easy enough to suggest a little more simplicity, a little more hardness in life, but that would be merely playing with the question.

Thoughts and thoughts like these brought me to the spinning wheel. I said to myself, as I say to you now, that if you could but establish a living link between those famishing millions and yourselves, there is some hope for you, for them and for the world.

Religious instruction you have, and very properly, in this institution. You have got also a beautiful temple. I see from your time-table that you begin the day by offering worship, all of which is good and elevating, but it may easily amount to a beautiful ceremonial and nothing else, if that worship is not translated day after day into some practical work. So, I say, in order to follow out that act of worship, take up the spinning wheel, sit at it for half an hour, and think of these millions that I have described to you and say in the name of God: 'I spin for the sake of them.' If you do it with your heart, with the knowledge that you are the humbler and the richer for that real act of devotion, if you will dress not for show, but for covering your limbs, you will certainly not have any hesitation in wearing *khadi* and establishing that bond between yourselves and the millions.

This is not all that I want to say to the girls of this institution.

If you will be deserving of the care and attention that Sir Ramanathan has bestowed upon you, and that is being bestowed on you by Lady Ramanathan and the staff working under her care, you will have to do many more things. I saw in your magazines mention made, with some degree of pardonable pride, of what some of the old school girls had been doing. I saw notices after this style. So and so married so and so—4 or 5 notices. There is, I know, nothing wrong in a girl who has come of age, about 25 or even 22 years old, in getting married. But I miss in these notices a single mention of a girl who had dedicated herself to service only. So, I propose to tell you what I told the girls of H.H. the Maharajah's College for Girls in Bangalore, that we get a poor return for the great efforts that are being made by educationists

and by lavish charities, if you all become mere dolls and disappear from life as soon as you are discharged from such institutions.

A vast majority of girls disappear from public life as soon as they are discharged from schools and colleges. You, of this institution, have no such business. You have the example of Miss Emery and the example of others who have been superintending, and who have been, if I am not speaking incorrectly, maidens.

Every girl, every Indian girl, is not born to marry. I can show many girls who are to-day dedicating themselves to service, instead of serving one man. It is high time that Hindu girls produce or reproduce an edition, and, if possible, a glorified edition of Parvati and Sita.

You claim to be Saivites. You know what Parvati did. She did not spend money for a husband, nor would she allow herself to be bought, and she to-day adorns the Hindu firmament by being classed with one of the Seven *Satis*—not because of the degrees in an educational institution that she received, but because of her unheard of *tapasya* (penance).

Here, I understand that there is the hateful system of dowry, whereby it becomes most difficult for young women to get suitable matches. The grown-up girls—some of you are grown-up—are expected to resist all such temptations. If you will resist these evil customs, some of you will have to begin by remaining maidens either for life, or at least for a number of years. Then, when it is time for you to marry, and you feel that you must have a partner in life, you will not be in thirst of one who has money or fame, or beauty of person, but you will be in search of one—even as Parvati was—who has got all the matchless qualities which go to make good character. You know how Naradjee described Siva to Parvati—a mere pauper smeared with ashes, no handsomeness about him and a *brahmachari*, and Parvati said: 'Yes, he will be my husband.' You won't have several editions of Siva, unless some of you will be content to offer *tapasya*

not for thousands of years, as Parvati did. We, frail human beings, cannot afford to do it, but you can do at least during your life-time.

If you will accept these conditions, you will refuse to disappear into the kingdom of dolls, but will aspire to be *Satis* like Parvati, Damayanti, Sita and Savitri. Then, and not till then, in my humble opinion, will you have deserved an institution of this character.

May God fire you with this ambition, and if you are inspired, may He help you to realize this ambition !

CURSE OF CHILD-MARRIAGE

"This custom of child-marriage is both a moral as well as a physical evil. For, it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs, we recede from God as well as *Swaraj*."

Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins has sent me notes of a tragic case that appears to have just occurred in Madras and has arisen out of a child-marriage, the girl being 13 years and the 'husband' 26. Hardly had the pair lived together for 13 days, when the girl died of burning. The jury have found that she committed suicide owing to the unbearable and inhuman solicitation of the so-called husband. The dying deposition of the girl would go to show that the 'husband' had set fire to her clothes. Passion knows no prudence, no pity.

But how the girl died is beside the point. The indisputable facts are:

1. That the girl was married when she was only 13;
2. That she had no sexual desire, inasmuch as she resisted the advances of the 'husband';
3. That the 'husband' did make cruel advances;
4. And that she is now no more.

It is irreligion, not religion, to give religious sanction to a brutal custom. The *Smritis* bristle with contradictions. The only reasonable deduction to be drawn from the contradictions is that the texts, that may be contrary to known and accepted morality, more especially to the moral precepts enjoined in the *Smritis* themselves, must be rejected as interpolations. Inspiring verses on self-restraint could not be written at the same time and by the same pen that wrote the verses encouraging the brute in man. Only a man, innocent

of self-restraint and steeped in vice, could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly periods. It should be held sinful to marry a girl for several years after the periods begin. There cannot be even the thought of marriage before the periods begin. A girl is no more fit to bear children on beginning the periods than a lad is to procreate as soon as he grows the first hair on his upper lip.

This custom of child-marriage is both a moral as well as a physical evil. For, it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs, we recede from God as well as *Swaraj*. A man who has no thought of the tender age of a girl has none of God. And under-grown men have no capacity for fighting battles of freedom, or, having gained it, of retaining it. Fight for *Swaraj* means, not mere political awakening, but an all round awakening—social, educational, moral, economic and political.

Legislation is being promoted to raise the age of consent. It may be good for bringing a minority to book. But it is not legislation that will cure a popular evil, it is enlightened public opinion that can do it. I am not opposed to legislation in such matters, but I do lay greater stress on cultivation of public opinion. The Madras case would have been impossible, if there had been a living public opinion against child-marriages. The young man in question is not an illiterate labourer, but an intelligent educated typist. It would have been impossible for him to marry or touch the girl, if public opinion had been against the marriage or the consummation of the marriage of girls of tender age. Ordinarily, a girl under 18 years should never be given in marriage.

DEFENDING CHILD-MARRIAGE

"We have many abuses in our midst, moral, social, economical and political. They require patient study, diligent research, delicate handling, accuracy of statement and clear thinking on them, and sober impartial judgment."

A reader of *Young India* writes:

"I am very much pained to read the following sentence in your article on *Curse of Child-Marriage*, published in the *Young India* of the 26th August 1926: 'Only a man innocent of self-restraint and steeped in vice could call it a sin not to marry a girl before she reached the age of monthly period.'

"I fail to understand why you could not take a charitable view of those whose opinion differs from you. One can certainly say that the Hindu law-giver was entirely wrong in prescribing child-marriage. But I think it improper to say that those who insist on child-marriage are 'steeped in vice.' It seems to go beyond the limits of politeness in controversy. In fact, this is the first time that I heard such an argument against child-marriage. Neither the Hindu social reformers nor the Christian missionaries ever said so, so far as I am aware. Imagine, therefore, the shock which I received when I found this argument in writing of Mahatma Gandhi whom I believed to be perfection itself, so far at least as charity towards opponents is concerned.

"You have condemned not one or two, but probably every one of the Hindu law-givers. So far as I know, every *Smritikara* enjoins early marriages of girls. It is impossible to hold, as you have suggested, that the passages enjoining early marriage are interpolations. The practice of early marriage is not confined to any province or class of society, but is practically a universal custom in India. It is also a very old practice dating from the time of the *Ramayana*.

"I shall try to give briefly what I consider might have been the reasons why the Hindu law-givers insisted upon early marriage of girls. They considered it very desirable that every girl should have a husband as a rule. This is necessary, no less for the peace of mind and happiness of the girls themselves, than for

the welfare of the society in general. If every girl has to be provided with a husband, the choice of husband should be made by the parents of the girl and not by the girls themselves. If the choice is left to the girls themselves, it will result in many girls not being married at all, not because they do not like marriage but because it is very difficult for all girls to find out suitable husbands. It is also dangerous, for it might lead to flirtation and might cause looseness of morals. Youths, who appear to be good, might ruin the virtue of simple girls. Again, if the choice is to be made by parents, the girls must be married young. When they are grown-up, they may fall in love and may not like to marry the bridegroom selected by the parents. When a girl is married young, she becomes one with her husband and his family. The union is more natural and more perfect. It is sometimes difficult for grown-up girls, with fixed ideas and habits, to adapt themselves in a new home.

"The chief objection to early marriage is that it weakens the health of the girl and her children. But this objection is not very convincing for the following reasons. The age of marriage is now rising among the Hindus, but the race is becoming weaker. Fifty or hundred years ago, the men and women were generally stronger, healthier, and more long-lived than now. But early marriage was, then, more in vogue. The physique of educated girls who are married late is not generally better than the girls who receive less education and are married early. From these facts it appears probable that early marriage does not cause as much physical deterioration as some people believe.

"You have good knowledge of both European society and Indian society. You will be able to say whether on the whole Indian wives are more devoted to their husbands than European wives; whether among the poor people the Indian husbands treat their wives more kindly than European husbands; whether there are fewer cases of unhappy marriages among Indians than among Europeans; whether sexual morality is higher in Indian society than in European society. If in these respects the Indian marriages are more successful than European marriages, then, early marriage, which is an essential feature of Indian marriages, should not be condemned.

"I cannot believe that the Hindu law-givers were actuated by any consideration except the true welfare of society in general (including both the men and women) in laying down the injunction of early marriage of girls. I believe that early marriage of girls is one of the features of Hindu society, which has maintained its purity and prevented its disruption in spite of very hostile environments. You may not believe all this. But may we not expect

that you should discard your idea that all the great Hindu law-givers, who have insisted on early marriage of girls, were innocent of self-restraint and were 'steeped in vice' ?

"The Madras case reported by you seems to be very peculiar. The jury held that the girl committed suicide. But the girl said that her husband set fire to her clothes. In these conflicting circumstances, it is very difficult to hold that the facts, which you consider to be indisputable, are really so. There have been millions of cases of girl-wives below 13. Not one case of suicide, due to cruel advances of the husband, has been heard before. Probably, there were peculiar features in the Madras case, and early marriage was not the principal cause of the death."

Well does the Poet say: 'It costs very little to fashion a suitable philosophy in order to mitigate the rudeness of facts that secretly hurt one's conscience.'

This 'reader of *Young India*' has gone a step further. He has not only fashioned a suitable philosophy but ignored facts, and erected his argument on unsupported statements.

The charge of want of charity I must pass by, if only because I have not accused the law-givers, but I have ventured to impute vice to those who could insist on marriage at an age too tender for bearing the burden of motherhood. Want of charity comes into being only when you accuse a live person, not an imaginary being, and that too without cause, of impure motives. But is there any warrant for the writer saying that the original authors of the several *Smritis* who preached self-restraint wrote the verses enjoining marriage of little girls ? Is it not more charitable to assume that the *Rishis* could not be guilty of impurity or gross ignorance of cardinal facts concerning the growth of the human body ?

But even if the texts ordering child, as opposed to early (for, early marriage means marriage well before 25) marriage be found to be authoritative, we must reject them in the light of positive experience and scientific knowledge. I question the accuracy of the statement

that child-marriage is universal in Hindu society. I should be sorry to find that 'millions of girls' are married, *i.e.*, live as wives, whilst they are yet children. The Hindus would have died as a race long ago, if 'millions of girls' had their marriages consummated at, say, the age of eleven.

Nor does it follow that if the parents are to continue to make the choice of husbands for their daughters, the marriage must be contracted and consummated early. It is still less true to maintain that if girls have to make their choice, there must be courtship and flirtation. After all, courtship is not universal in Europe, and thousands of Hindu girls are married after fifteen and yet have their husbands selected by their parents. Mussalman parents invariably select husbands for their grown-up daughters. Whether the choice is to be made by girls or their parents is a separate question and is regulated by custom.

The correspondent has tendered no proof to support the statement that children of grown-up wives are weaker than those of child-wives. In spite of my experience of both Indian and European society, I must refuse to enter into a comparison of their morals. Granting, however, for the sake of argument, that morals of European society are lower than those of Hindu society, will it naturally follow that the lowness is due to the marriages taking place after full maturity?

Lastly, the Madras case does not help the correspondent, but his use of it betrays his hasty judgment based upon a total disregard of facts. If he will refer to the article again, he will discover that I have drawn my conclusion from proved facts. My conclusion is unaffected by the cause of death. It was proved (1) that the girl was of tender age; (2) that she had no sexual desire; (3) that the "husband" made cruel advances; (4) that she is no more. It was bad enough if the girl committed suicide, it was worse if the husband murdered her because she could not yield to his inhuman lust. The girl was fit only to learn and play, not to play the wife

and carry on her tiny shoulders the weight of household cares, or the yoke of a lord and master.

My correspondent is a man occupying high position in society. The nation expects better things from those of her sons and daughters who have received a liberal education, and who are expected to think and act in her behalf. We have many abuses in our midst, moral, social, economical, and political. They require patient study, diligent research, delicate handling, accuracy of statement and clear thinking on them, and sober impartial judgment. We may then differ, if necessary, as poles asunder. But we shall surely harm the country, our respective religions and the national cause, if we do not toil to discover the truth and adhere to it, cost what it may.

AWFULNESS OF CHILD-MARRIAGE

"The evil of child-marriage is at least as extensive in the villages as in the cities. It is pre-eminently women's work. Men have no doubt to do their share. But when a man turns into a beast, he is not likely to listen to reason."

The Anti-Child-Marriage Committee has published a useful and instructive bulletin on child-marriage. I copy the main paragraphs below:

"The Census Report for India of 1931 gave the following figures of the number of girls, who are married under the age of 15, by age groups:

Age group	*Percentage married*
0 to 1	.8
1 " 2	1.2
2 " 3	2.0
3 " 4	4.2
4 " 5	6.6
5 " 10	19.3
10 " 15	38.1

"Thus, nearly one girl in 100 girls of less than one year of age is married, and the same horrible fact is repeated in all the other age groups under 15.

"One consequence of this is the almost unbelievable number of child-widows in the country. The figures are:

Age group	*Actual number of widows*
0 to 1	1, 515
1 " 2	1, 785
2 " 3	3, 485
3 " 4	9, 076
4 " 5	15, 019
5 " 10	1,05, 482
10 " 15	1,85, 339

"The evil of child-marriage is often said to be quantitatively small and the custom not universal; but even if the number of child-widows revealed in these figures is one-hundredth of the actual figures, no humanitarian, public or Government, will wait a moment before preventing the source of this misery. In this connection, let us also remember that for most of these children re-marriage is impossible.

"Another consequence of child-marriage is the number of young mothers who die in child-birth. 200,000 deaths in child-birth is the yearly average for India. This works up to 20 deaths per hour, and a vast number of these deaths occur to girls in their teens. According to Sir John Megaw, 'of every 1,000 young mothers, 100 are destined to die in child-birth before they cease having babies.' We have no accurate figures for maternal mortality. It is estimated at 24.5 per thousand for India, whereas it is only 4.5 for England.

"Lastly, child-marriage affects not merely the mother but the child and, therefore, the race. In India, out of every 1,000 children born, 181 die. This is the average; there are places in India where the average goes up to 400 per 1,000. The very backward condition of India, in this respect, is evident by a comparison of figures for infant mortality in England and Japan, which are 60 and 24 per mille respectively. The horror is indeed great when we remember that the evil is a preventable one, and it is the lack of an educated social conscience which has allowed the evil to flourish unchecked.

"The most regrettable fact of all is that in all these respects progress is so slow, even if it is existent. For example, in 1921, there were 9,066 wives under the age of 1, in 1931 there were 44,082—an increase of nearly 5 times while the population increased only by one-tenth. Again, in 1921 there were 759 widows under 1, and in 1931 the corresponding number was 1,515. The successive census figures show the most microscopic improvement. The population is increasing far more rapidly than the progress in measures to check these evils. The call for active steps to eradicate them is, therefore, more urgent than ever, and the women's movement in India can have no higher or more urgent task than the rousing of the conscience of the public and the Government in this matter."

The figures should cause us all to hang our heads in shame. But, that won't remedy the evil. The evil of child-marriage is at least as extensive in the villages as in the cities. It is pre-eminently women's work. Men

have, no doubt, to do their share. But when a man turns into a beast, he is not likely to listen to reason. It is the mothers who have to be educated to understand their privilege and duty of refusal. Who can teach them this but women? I venture to suggest, therefore, that the All-India Women's Conference to be true to its name has to descend to the villages. The bulletins are valuable. They only reach a few of the English-knowing city-dwellers. What is needed is personal touch with the village women. Even when, if ever, it is established, the task won't be easy. But, some day or other, the beginning has to be made in that direction before any result can be hoped for. Will the A.I.W.C. make common cause with the A.I.V.I.A? No village worker, no matter how able he or she is, need expect to approach villagers purely for the sake of social reform. They will have to touch all spheres of village life. Village work, I must repeat, means real education not in the three R's, but in opening the minds of the villagers to the needs of true life befitting thinking beings, which humans are supposed to be.

HELPLESS WIDOWS

"I have repeatedly said that every widow has as much right to re-marry as every widower. Voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon in Hinduism; enforced widowhood is a curse."

A bereaved friend sends a pathetic letter, describing the plight of a 17 years old girl who has lost in Quetta Earthqake her husband, two months old child, father-in-law and her husband's younger brother, that is to say everybody in her father-in-law's house. My correspondent adds that she escaped unhurt and returned with only her clothes on. She is his uncle's daughter and he does not know how to console her or what to do with her. She herself is not undamaged. Her leg has been injured, though fortunately the bone remains intact. The correspondent concludes by saying:

"I have left her with her mother in Lahore. I gently mentioned to her and other relatives whether the girl might not be re-married. Some listened to me sympathetically and some resented the proposal. I have no doubt that many a girl must have suffered the same fate as this cousin of mine. Will you say a word of encouragement to these unfortunate widows?"

I do not know what my pen or voice can do in matters in which age-long prejudices are concerned. I have repeatedly said that every widow has as much right to re-marry as every widower. Voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon in Hinduism; enforced widowhood is a curse. And I very much feel that many young widows, if they were absolutely free, not so much from the fear of physical restraint as from the opprobrium of Hindu public opinion, would re-marry without the slightest hesitation. All the young widows, therefore, who are

in the unfortunate position of this bereaved sister from Quetta, should have every inducement given to them to re-marry, and should be sure that no blame would be attached to them if they chose to re-marry, and every effort should be made to select for them suitable matches. This is not work that can be done by any institution. This work has got to be done by individual reformers whose relatives have become widows, and they have to carry on a vigorous, dignified and restrained propaganda in their own circles, and whenever they succeed they should give the widest publicity to the event. Thus, and only thus, there is likely to be tangible relief provided for the girls who might have become widows during the earthquake. It is possible that the public sympathy can be easily mobilized whilst the memory of the tragedy is fresh in mind, and if once the reform takes place on a large scale, the girls who may have become widows in the natural course will also find it easy to get married if they are willing to do so.

ENFORCED WIDOWHOOD

> "No outside imposition can cure Hindu society of the enforced widowhood of girls, who don't even know what marriage is. The reform can come, first, by the force of enlightened public opinion among Hindus; secondly, by parents recognizing the duty of marrying their girl-widows."

Pyarelal has unearthed the following instructive extract on the *Suttee* and widowhood from the treatise on *Universal History* by Diodorus, the Sicilian, who lived in the age of Julius Cæsar:

> "Now, it was an ancient law among the Indians that when young men and maidens were minded to wed, they did not marry according to the judgment of the parents, but by mutual consent. But when espousals were made between persons of immature age, mistakes of judgment were of frequent occurrence, and when both sides repented their union, many of the women became depraved, and through incontinence fell in love with other men, and when at last they wished to leave their husbands they had first chosen, but could not in decency do so openly, they got rid of them by poison, a means of destroying life which they could readily procure in their country which produces in great quantity and variety drugs of fatal potency, some of which cause death if merely introduced as powder into food and drink. But when this nefarious practice had become quite prevalent, and many lives had been sacrificed, and when it was found that the punishment of the guilty had no effect in deterring other wives from their career of iniquity, they passed a law ordaining that a wife, unless she was pregnant or had already borne children, should be burned along with the deceased husband, and that if she did not choose to obey the law, she should remain a widow to the end of her life, and be for ever excommunicated from the sacrifices and other solemnities as being an impious person."

If these extracts give a faithful account of the origin of the two inhuman customs, we have reason to thank Heavens for the suppression of the *Suttee* by law imposed

upon us. No outside imposition can cure Hindu society of the enforced widowhood of girls, who don't even know what marriage is. The reform can come first by the force of enlightened public opinion among Hindus, secondly, by parents recognizing the duty of marrying their girl widows. This they can do, where the girls' consent is lacking, by educating their minds to the correctness of their marrying. Naturally this refers to girls under age. Where the so-called widows have grown to maturity and they do not desire to marry, nothing is necessary save to tell them that they are free to marry precisely as if they were maidens unmarried. It is difficult to break the chains of prisoners who hug them, mistaking them as ornaments, as girls and even grown-up women do regard their silver or golden chains and rings as ornaments.

AN IDEAL SATIHOOD

"*Satihood* is the acme of purity. This purity cannot be attained or realized by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day."

A lady correspondent having invited him to express his opinion on an alleged case of Sati *that was reported in a Bombay paper, Gandhiji delivered himself on the subject in an article in the* Navajivan *as follows :*

I hope that the incident as reported in the Press is not true, and that the lady in question died through illness or through accident, not by suicide. A *Sati* has been described by our ancients—and the description holds good to-day—as one who ever fixed in her love and devotion to her husband signalizes herself by her selfless service during her husband's lifetime as well as after, and remains absolutely chaste in thought, word and deed. Self-immolation at the death of the husband is not a sign of enlightenment, but of gross ignorance as to the nature of the soul. The soul is immortal, unchangeable and immanent. It does not perish with the physical body but journeys on from one mortal frame to another, till it completely emancipates itself from earthly bondage. The truth of it has been attested to by the experience of countless sages and seers, and can be realized by anyone who may wish to even to-day. How can suicide be, then, justified in the light of these facts?

Again, true marriage means not merely union of bodies. It connotes the union of the souls too. If marriage meant no more than a physical relationship, the bereaved wife should be satisfied with a portrait or a waxen image of her husband. But self-destruction is

worse than futile. It cannot help to restore the dead to life, on the contrary it only takes away one more from the world of the living.

The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping-stone to the divine or universal love. That is why immortal Mira sang:

"God alone is my husband—none else."

It follows from this, that a *Sati* would regard marriage not as a means of satisfying the animal appetite, but as a means of realizing the ideal of selfless and self-effacing service by completely merging her individuality in her husband's. She would prove her *Satihood* not by mounting the funeral pyre at her husband's death, but she would prove it with every breath that she breathes from the moment that she plighted her troth to him at the *saptapadi* ceremony, by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would shun creature comforts and delights of the senses. She would refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family, but would utilize every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating renunciation and self-discipline, and by completely identifying herself with her husband learn to identify herself with the whole world.

Such a *Sati* would refuse to give way to wild grief at the death of her husband, but would ever strive to make her late husband's ideals and virtues live again in her actions, and thereby win for him the crown of immortality. Knowing that the soul of him whom she married is not dead but still lives, she will never think of re-marrying.

The reader will here be, perhaps, tempted to ask: 'The *Sati* that you have pictured is a being untouched by passion or animal appetite. She can have no desire for offspring. Why should she marry at all?' The reply is that, in our present day Hindu society, marriage, in a vast

majority of cases, is not a matter of choice. Again, there are some who believe that in our ramshackle age, marriage is necessary as a shield to virtue and as an aid to self-restraint. And, as a matter of fact, I personally know several instances of persons who, though at the time of the marriage were not free from animal passion, later on became imbued with the ideal of absolute chastity and found in their married life a powerful means for realizing their ideal. I have cited these instances to show that the ideal of *Sati* that I have depicted is not merely a counsel of perfection that has no place outside the world of theory, but something that has to be lived up to and realized in this very matter-of-fact world of ours.

But I readily concede that the average wife who strives to attain the ideal of *Sati* will be a mother too. She must, therefore, add to her various other qualities mentioned above a knowledge of rearing and bringing up children, so that they might live to be true servants of their country.

All that I have said about the wife applies equally to the husband. If the wife has to prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband, so has the husband to prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife. You cannot have one set of weights and measures for the one, and a different one for the other. Yet, we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife. It may, therefore, be taken for granted that the practice of the widow immolating herself at the death of her husband had its origin in superstitious ignorance and the blind egotism of man. Even if it could be proved that at one time the practice had a meaning, it can only be regarded as barbarous in the present age. The wife is not the slave of the husband but his comrade, otherwise known as his better-half, his colleague and friend. She is a co-sharer with him of equal rights and of equal duties. Their obligations towards each other and towards the world must, therefore, be the same and reciprocal.

I, therefore, regard the alleged self-immolation of this sister as vain. It certainly cannot be set up as an example to be copied. 'Don't I appreciate at least her courage to die?'—I may, perhaps, be asked. My reply is 'no', in all conscience. Have we not seen evil-doers display this sort of courage? Yet no one has ever thought of complimenting them on it. Why should I take upon me the sin of even unconsciously leading astray some ignorant sister by my injudicious praise of suicide? *Satihood* is the acme of purity. This purity cannot be attained or realized by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day.

PROSTITUTION OF IDEALS

"The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly out of his teens, can do, is to purge himself of his sin by re-marrying the daughter when she becomes widowed."

I extract the following from a letter on the re-marriage of child-widows:

"In your reply to B. Agra, in the *Young India* of September 23, you say that child-widows should be re-married by their parents. How can this be done by those parents who perform *Kanyadan*, *i.e.*, who give their daughters in marriage according to *Shastric* injunctions. Surely, it is impossible for parents, who have most solemnly and by religious rites renounced all claims on their daughter in favour of their son-in-law, to give her in marriage after his death to another person. She may of her own accord re-marry if she will, but since she was given by her parents as a gift or donation (*dan*) to her husband, no one in the world after the death of her husband has any right to give her in marriage. And, for the same reason, she would, therefore, be faithless and traitress to her dead husband, if she re-married without his express consent given at the time of his death. From a logical point of view, it is thus impossible for a widow—be she child, young or old—who was married according to *Kanyadan* system which is prevalent amongst most *Sanatanis*, to re-marry unless her husband had given her permission to do so. A true *Sanatani* husband cannot, however, brook the idea of giving such permission. He will rather fain agree to his wife's becoming *sati* if she can, or at any rate will like her to spend the rest of her life in devotion to his memory or, which is the same thing, in devotion to God. In this, he will solely be actuated by the desire or sense of duty to help the preservation of the high ideals of Hindu marriage and widowhood which are complimentary to, and not independent of, each other."

I regard this kind of argument as prostitution of a high ideal. No doubt the correspondent means well, but his over-anxiety about purity of women makes him

lose sight of elementary justice. What is *Kanyadan* in case of little children ? Has a father any rights of property over his children ? He is their protector, not owner. And, he forfeits the privilege of protection when he abuses it by seeking to barter away the liberty of his ward. Again, how can a donation be made to a child who is incapable of receiving a gift ? There is no gift where the capacity to receive is lacking. Surely, *Kanyadan* is a mystic, religious rite with a spiritual significance. To use such terms in their literal sense is an abuse of language and religion. One may as well take literally the mystic language of the *Puranas* and believe in the earth being a flat dish, sustained on the hood of a thousand-headed snake, and Divinity lying in soft ease on an ocean of milk for His bed.

The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly out of his teens, can do, is to purge himself of his sin by re-marrying the daughter when she becomes widowed. As I have said in a previous note, such marriages should be declared null and void from the beginning.

RE-MARRIAGE OF WIDOWS

"From childhood up a slave-mentality is sedulously cultivated in us. And if we cannot think freely, how can we act freely? We are alike slaves of the caste, of a foreign education, and of an alien government."

A friend has thus unbosomed himself:

"Why do not you say something strong about our miserable widows? Their orthodox parents or guardians are never going to listen to reason. Why not encourage the widows to take the initiative?

"And, then, there are our numerous evil customs and usages, our wretched dowry system, our post-nuptial and *post mortem* dinners and so on."

Re-marriage of widows is necessary to a certain extent. The reform can be brought about only when our youths have purified themselves. Are they pure? Do they profit by their education? Or, why blame their education? From childhood up a slave-mentality is sedulously cultivated in us. And if we cannot think freely, how can we act freely? We are alike slaves of the caste, of a foreign education, and of an alien government. Every one of the facilities provided us have become our fetters. There are so many educated youths amongst us. How few of them have thought of the lot of widows in their own homes? How few have resisted the temptation of lucre? How few regard them as their own sisters and mothers and protect their honour? How few have had the courage of their convictions and defied their castes to do their worst? Whom is the poor widow to approach? What comfort can I bring her? How few of them are readers of *Navajivan*? How few even of those who read it can act up to their convictions? And

yet, I have occasionally devoted the columns of *Navajivan* to the widows' wail and hope to do more as opportunity offers itself. In the meantime, I would appeal to everyone who has a child-widow under his care, to consider it his duty to marry her.

The correspondent has cast a lurid light on our social customs. But when the whole body is rotten, how can we be satisfied with a few patches here and there? *Post mortem* dinners are barbarous. But post-nuptial dinners are no less so. We might consider the latter to be less barbarous, because the religious ceremony of marriage is, all the world over, an expensive affair, more or less. But the Hindus alone have the monopoly of having *post mortem* dinners. These and other matters badly need attention. But a reform all over will come with the awakening of the moral consciousness of our people, and with the liberation of their thought. So long as our thought and action are not free, patch-work will be worse than useless.

SUPPRESSED HUMANITY

"It is a crime against God and man to call the union of children a married state, and then to decree widowhood for a girl whose so-called husband is dead."

The untouchable is not the only portion of suppressed humanity. The young widow in Hindu society is no less so. A correspondent from Bengal writes:

"There is no restriction among Muslims about widow re-marriage, but there is provision for a man to marry up to four wives, and, as a matter of fact, many Muslims have more than one wife. So, none of the Muslim male population remains unmarried. Is it not, therefore, true that where there is no restriction against widow re-marriage, the number of females is much in excess of males? In other words, is it not true that in the communities in which widow re-marriage is allowed, polygamy should also be allowed?

"If widow re-marriage is made common among Hindus, will not young widows, induce young men to marry them and make it difficult, rather impossible, to find out bridegrooms for unmarried girls?

"Will not unmarried girls, then, commit all the sins which are committed or are presumed to be committed by widows, if there be no provision to keep more than one wife by a Hindu?

"I refrain from reminding you of the love (*prem*), the saintly *grahastha* life, the *Pativrata Dharma* and such other things, which should be taken into consideration in recommending widow re-marriage."

In his zeal to prevent widows from re-marrying, the correspondent has ignored many things. Mussalmans have, indeed, the right to take more than one wife, but the vast majority of them have only one wife. The correspondent does not seem to know that unfortunately there is no prohibition against polygamy in Hinduism. Hindus in highest circles, have been known to marry more than one

wife. Many princes marry an unlimited number. The correspondent further forgets the fact, that it is only among the so-called higher classes that widow re-marriage is prohibited. Among the vast majority, belonging to the fourth division, widows freely re-marry, but no untoward consequences have taken place. Though free to take more wives than one, they are, as a rule, satisfied with one companion at a time.

The suggestion, that young widows will take up all young men and leave none for unmarried girls, betrays a woeful want of sense of proportion. The excessive anxiety for the chastity of young girls betrays an unhealthy mind. The limited number of widows re-marrying can never leave a large number of young girls unmarried. And, in any event, if ever such a problem arose, it would be found to be due to the early marriages that take place to-day. The remedy in anticipation is to prevent early marriages.

Of the love, the sanctity of *grahastha* life, etc., where there is a widow of tender age, the less said the better.

But the correspondent has missed the whole of my point. I have never advocated widow re-marriage on a wholesale scale. The statistics collected by Sir Ganga Ram and summarized in these pages deal with widows upto 15 years only. These poor, wretched beings know nothing of *Pativrata Dharma*. They are strangers to love. The truer statement would be to say that these girls were never married at all. If marriage is, as it ought to be, a sacrament, an entrance into a new life, the girls to be married should be fully developed, should have some hand in the choice of companions for life, and should know the consequences of their acts. It is a crime against God and man to call the union of the children a married state, and then to decree widowhood for a girl whose so-called husband is dead.

I do believe that a real Hindu widow is a treasure. She is one of the gifts of Hinduism to humanity. Rama-

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bai Ranade was such a gift. But the existence of girl-widows is a blot upon Hinduism, for which the existence of a Ramabai is no atonement.

CHILD-WIVES AND CHILD-WIDOWS

"Do you suppose that we can possibly call ourselves men, worthy of ruling ourselves or others, or shaping the destiny of a nation containing 30 crores, so long as there is one single widow who wishes to fulfil her fundamental wants but is violently prevented from doing so? It is not religion, but irreligion."

In the course of his speech at Pachiappa's College, Madras, Gandhiji said:

A learned Tamilian has written to me to address students on child-widows. He has said that the hardships of child-widows in this presidency are far greater than those of child-widows in other parts of India. I have not been able to test the truth of this statement. You should know that better than I do. But what I would like you, young men around me, to do is that you should have a touch of chivalry about you. If you have that, I have a great suggestion to offer. I hope the majority of you are unmarried, and a fair number of you are also *brahmacharis*. I have to say 'a fair number' because I know students; a student who casts his lustful eyes upon his sister is not a *brahmachari*. I want you to make this sacred resolve that you are not going to marry a girl who is not a widow, you will seek out a widow-girl and if you cannot get a widow-girl you are not going to marry at all. Make that determination, announce it to the world, announce it to your parents, if you have them, or to your sisters. I call them widow-girls by way of correction, because I believe that a child ten or fifteen years old, who was no consenting party to the so-called marriage, who having married, having never lived with the so-called husband, is suddenly declared to be a widow, is not a

widow. It is an abuse of the term, abuse of language and a sacrilege. The word 'widow' in Hinduism has a sacred odour about it. I am a worshipper of a true widow like the late Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, who knew what it was to be a widow. But a child 9 years old knows nothing of what a husband should be. If it is not true that there are such child-widows in the presidency, then my case falls to the ground. But if there are such child-widows, it becomes your sacred duty to make the determination to marry a girl-widow, if you want to rid ourselves of this curse. I am superstitious enough to believe that all such sins that a nation commits react upon it physically. I believe that all these sins of ours have accumulated together to reduce us to a state of slavery. You may get the finest constitution that is conceivable dropping upon you from the House of Commons. It will be worthless, if there are not men and women fit enough to work that constitution. Do you suppose that we can possibly call ourselves men, worthy of ruling ourselves or others, or shaping the destiny of a nation containing 30 crores, so long as there is one single widow who wishes to fulfil her fundamental wants but is violently prevented from doing so? It is not religion, but irreligion. I say that saturated as I am with the spirit of Hinduism. Do not make the mistake that it is Western spirit in me that is speaking. I claim to be full to overflowing with the spirit of India, undefiled. I have assimilated many things from the West, but not this. There is no warrant for this kind of widowhood in Hinduism.

All I have said about child-widows, necessarily applies to child-wives. You must be able surely to control your lust to this extent, that you are not going to marry a girl that is under 16 years of age. If I could do so, I would lay down 20 as the minimum. Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of 20 who are pure and undefiled, and able to stand the storm that may rage round.

Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves. Some Brahman students tell me that they cannot follow this principle, that they cannot get Brahman girls sixteen years old, very few Brahmans keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahman girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then, I say to the Brahman youth: Cease to be a Brahman, if you cannot possibly control yourself. Choose a grown-up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a Brahman widow who has reached that age, then, go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of Hindus will pardon that boy, who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your heart is not pure, and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to live up to the name of a premier institution which must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character, and what is character without elementary personal purity? Brahmanism I adore. I have defended *Varnashrama Dharma*. But Brahmanism that can tolerate untouchability, virgin-widowhood, spoliation of virgins, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of Brahmanism. There is no knowledge of *Brahman* therein. There is no true interpretation of the scripture. It is undiluted animalism. Brahmanism is made of sterner stuff. I want these few remarks of mine to go deep down into your hearts. I am watching the boys whilst I am speaking, and it hurts me to hear a single giggle whilst I am pouring out my heart. I have not come to appeal to your intellects but to your hearts. You are the hope of the country, and what I have said is of primary importance for you.

'AN INDIGNANT PROTEST'

"The statement that the widows attain *moksha* if they observe *brahmacharya* has no foundation whatsoever in experience. More things are necessary than mere *brahmacharya* for the attainment of the final bliss."

The Headmaster of a Bengali school writes:

"Your advice and utterances to students at Madras, asking them to marry widowed girls only, have horrified us and I send forth my humble but indignant protest.

"This kind of advice will tend to destroy the tendency of widows to observe life-long *brahmacharya*, which has given Indian womanhood the greatest, or rather the highest, place in the world, and destroy their chances of attaining salvation through *brahmacharya* in a single birth, throwing them on the filthy path of worldly happiness. Thus, this kind of keen sympathy for widows will do a great disservice to them, and an injustice to the maidens whose marriage problem has become, at present, one of complexity and difficulty. Your theory of marriage will over-turn the Hindu theory of transmigration, rebirth and even *mukti*, and will bring down Hindu society on the same level with other societies, which we do not like. Our society has been demoralized no doubt, but we must have our eyes open to Hindu ideals, and try to go up as far as we can, and not be influenced by the examples of other societies and ideals. Examples of Ahalyabai, Rani Bhavani, Behula, Sita, Savitri, Damayanti will guide the Hindu society and we must direct it according to their ideals. I beg most humbly, therefore, that you will refrain from giving your opinions on these knotty questions and allow the society to do what it thinks best."

The 'indignant' protest leaves me unconverted and unrepentant. My advice will not wean from her purpose a single widow, who has a will of her own and who knows *brahmacharya* and is bent upon observing it. But, if the advice is followed, it will certainly bring great relief to those girls of tender age, who knew not the meaning of marriage when they were put through the ceremony.

The use of the term 'widow' in their connection is a violent abuse of a name with sacred associations. It is precisely for the very object that my correspondent has in view, that I advise the youth of the country to marry these so-called widows or not at all. The sacredness of the institution can be preserved only when it is purged of the curse of child-widowhood.

The statement, that the widows attain *moksha* if they observe *brahmacharya,* has no foundation whatsoever in experience. More things are necessary than mere *brahmacharya* for the attainment of the final bliss. And *brahmacharya* that is superimposed carries no merit with it, and often gives rise to secret vice that saps the morals of the society in which that vice exists. Let the correspondent know that I am writing from personal observation.

I should be glad, indeed, if my advice results in elementary justice being done to the maiden-widows, and if, for that reason, the other maidens, instead of being prematurely sold to man's lust, are given an opportunity of waiting for maturity in age and wisdom.

I have no theory of marriage that is inconsistent with a belief in transmigration, rebirth or *mukti.* The reader should know that millions of Hindus, whom he arrogantly describes as belonging to the lower order, have no ban on widow re-marriage. And I do not see how if re-marriage of old widowers does not interfere with that belief, real marriage of girls wrongly described as widows, can interfere with that grand belief. I may mention, for the edification of the correspondent, that transmigration and re-birth are not mere theories with me but facts as patent as the daily rise of the sun. *Mukti* is a fact to realize which I am striving with all my might. And, it is the contemplation of *mukti* which has given me a vivid consciousness of the wrong that is being done to these maiden-widows. Let us not in our emasculation mention in the same breath as these modern injured maiden-widows, the immortal names of Sita and others referred to by the

correspondent.

Lastly, whilst there is, and very properly, glorification of real widowhood in Hinduism, there is, so far as I am aware, no warrant for the belief that in the Vedic times there was any absolute ban upon re-marriage of widows. But my crusade is not against real widowhood. It is against its atrocious caricature. The better way is not to regard as widows at all the girls I have in view, and whom every Hindu who has a spark of chivalry in him is bound to relieve from their intolerable yoke. I, therefore, humbly, but emphatically, repeat the advice to every young Hindu to refuse to marry any but these maidens, miscalled widows.

ABOLISH MARRIAGE!

"Marriage is a fence that protects religion. If the fence were to be destroyed, religion would go to pieces. The foundation of religion is restraint, and marriage is nothing but restraint."

A correspondent, whom I know well, raises an issue, I take it, for purely academic interest, because I know the views he has set out are not his. "Is not our present day morality unnatural?," he asks. "If it was natural, it should have been the same everywhere in all ages, but every race and community seems to have its own peculiar marriage law, and in enforcing them men have made themselves worse than beasts. For, diseases which are unknown amongst animals are quite common amongst men; infanticide, abortions, child-marriages, which are impossible in the brute creation, are the curse of the society that holds up marriage as a sacrament, and no end of evil results have sprung from what we uphold as laws of morality. And, the miserable condition of Hindu widows—what is it due to, but to the existing marriage laws? Why not go back to Nature, and take a leaf out of the book of the brute creation?"

I do not know whether the advocates of free love in the West resort to the argument summarized above, or have any stronger reasons to put forth, but I am sure that the tendency to regard the marriage bond as barbarous is distinctly Western. If the argument is also borrowed from the West, there is no difficulty about meeting it.

It is a mistake to institute a comparison between man and the brute, and it is this comparison that vitiates the whole argument. For, man is higher than the brute in his moral instincts and moral institutions. The law of Nature as applied to the one, is different from the law

of Nature as applied to the other. Man has reason, discrimination, and free-will such as it is. The brute has no such thing. It is not a free agent, and knows no distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil. Man, being a free agent, knows these distinctions, and when he follows his higher nature shows himself far superior to the brute, but when he follows his baser nature can show himself lower than the brute. Even the races, regarded as the most uncivilized on earth, accept some restriction on sexual relations. If it be said that the restriction is itself barbarous, then, freedom from all restraints should be the law of man. If all men were to act according to this lawless law, there would be perfect chaos within twenty-four hours. Man being by nature more passionate than the brute, the moment all restraint is withdrawn, the lava of unbridled passion would overspread the whole earth and destroy mankind. Man is superior to the brute inasmuch as he is capable of self-restraint and sacrifice, of which the brute is incapable.

Some of the diseases that are so common at the present day are the result of infringement of marriage laws. I should like to know a single instance of a man, strictly observing the restraint of the marriage bond, having suffered from the diseases the correspondent has in mind. Infanticide, child-marriages and the like, are also the result of the breach of marriage laws. For, the law lays down that a man or woman shall choose a mate only when he or she has come of age, is healthy and capable of restraint, and desires to have progeny. Those who strictly obey this law, and regard the marriage bond as a sacrament, have never an occasion to be unhappy or miserable. Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not of bodies but the union of souls, indissoluble even by the death of either party. Where there is a true union of souls, the re-marriage of a widow or widower is unthinkable, improper and wrong. Marriages, where the true law of marriage is ignored, do not deserve the name. If we have very few true marriages now-a-days, it is not

the institution of marriage that is to blame, but the prevailing form of it, which should be reformed.

The correspondent contends that marriage is no moral or religious bond but a custom, and a custom which is opposed to religion and morality, and hence deserves to be abolished. I submit that marriage is a fence that protects religion. If the fence were to be destroyed, religion would go to pieces. The foundation of religion is restraint, and marriage is nothing but restraint. The man who knows no restraint has no hope of self-realization. I confess, it may be difficult to prove the necessity of restraint to an atheist or a materialist. But he who knows the perishable nature of flesh from the imperishable nature of the spirit, instinctively knows that self-realization is impossible without self-discipline and self-restraint. The body may either be a play-ground of passion, or temple of self-realization. If it is the latter, there is no room there for libertinism. The spirit needs must curb the flesh every moment.

Woman will be the apple of discord, where the marriage bond is loose, where there is no observance of the law of restraint. If men were as unrestrained as the brutes, they would straightway take the road to destruction. I am firmly of opinion that all the evils, that the correspondent complains of, can be eradicated not by abolishing marriage, but by a systematic understanding and observance of the law of marriage.

I agree that whereas amongst some communities marriage is permitted amongst very near relations, it is prohibited among other communities; that whereas some communities forbid polygamy, some permit it. Whilst one would wish that there was a uniform moral law accepted by all communities, the diversity does not point to the necessity of abolishing all restraint. As we grow wise in experience, our morality will gain in uniformity. Even to-day, the moral sense of the world holds up monogamy as the highest ideal, and no religion makes polygamy obligatory. The ideal remains unaffected by the relaxation

of practice according to time and place.

I need not reiterate my views regarding re-marriage of widows, as I consider re-marriage of virgin-widows not only desirable, but the bounden duty of all parents who happen to have such widowed daughters.

LOOSE THINKING

"In the giving away of a little girl by ignorant or heartless parents, without considering the welfare of the child and without her knowledge and consent, there is no marriage at all. Certainly, it is not a sacrament, and, therefore, re-marriage of such a girl becomes a duty."

A correspondent writes:

"In the course of an article *Abolish Marriage!* you have said at one place: 'Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not the union of bodies but the union of souls, indissoluble even by the death of either party. Where there is a true union of souls, the re-marriage of a widow or widower is unthinkable, improper and wrong.'

"At another place, in the course of the same article, you say: 'I consider re-marriage of virgin-widows not only desirable, but the bounden duty of all parents who happen to have such widowed daughters'.

"How do you reconcile the two views?"

I find no difficulty in reconciling the two views. In the giving away of a little girl by ignorant or heartless parents, without considering the welfare of the child and without her knowledge and consent, there is no marriage at all. Certainly, it is not a sacrament, and, therefore, re-marriage of such a girl becomes a duty. As a matter of fact, the word 're-marriage' is a misnomer in such cases. The virgin was never married at all in the true sense, and, therefore, on the death of her supposed husband it would be the most natural thing, it will be a duty, for the parents to seek for her a suitable companion in life.

VISIT TO A YOUNG WIDOW

"The curse of every widow, who is burning within to re-marry but dare not for fear of a cruel custom, descends upon Hindu society so long as it keeps the widow under an unforgivable bondage."

When we were going from Bezwada to Ellore, I was told that a girl who had just been widowed wanted to give me all her jewellery valued at Rs. 1,400 and that she wished me to go to her house in a village only less than two miles from Pedapadu where we had to go. Her caste people observed the *purdah*, and in no case could a girl recently widowed venture out, especially to a public meeting. The jewellery had little attraction for me. In fact, I did not believe my informants when they told me that the girl-widow could possibly wish to give up all her costly jewellery. But the fact of her being young and only recently widowed (I was told she was a virgin-widow) was enough to take me to her house. And, I was glad I went. The girl's name is Satyavati Devi. She is under 20. Her husband was a well-educated nationalist. She knows Telugu well. I found her to be a girl of courage and decision. She has both the parents alive. She placed into my hands all her ornaments, so far as I am aware. And they did appear to me to be worth fully Rs. 1,400. She put into my hands also a note which asked me to take her to the *Ashrama*. The parents were present when I met Satyavati Devi. And they were agreeable to her surrendering her ornaments for *khadi* work. I suggested to the parents that they should not keep her confined to the house, and that she should be treated just like the other girls in the family. I told the girl that she had no need to discard her orna-

ments merely because she was widowed. But she was firm. She had no longer any use for them. I told her I would gladly take her to the *Ashrama*, if the parents consented. The latter have promised to give the matter their consideration, and have given the girl every hope of her being sent with me at the end of the tour. The father, though he was undoubtedly cautious and reticent, appeared to me to be generously inclined towards his daughter. I was sorry I was unable to bring any greater consolation to the widow. It was with a heavy heart I parted from her.

At Pedapadu, therefore, my speech was devoted to Satyavati Dèvi. I told the audience that it was their duty to break down the *purdah*, and to help the parents of the widow to re-marry her if she was at all so inclined. If a young man of 18 being widowed could re-marry, why should not a widow of that age have the same right? Voluntary enlightened widowhood is a great asset for any nation, as enforced ignorant widowhood is a disgrace. The audience listened with respect and great attention. The father of the widow was present at the meeting. I subsequently learnt that the idea of parting with the ornaments was the widow's own original idea, and that she had no desire whatsoever of re-marrying. Her great desire is, I was told, to give herself to study with a view ultimately to dedicate her life to national service. All honour to Satyavati, if such is really her mature decision. Hindu society must make the way absolutely open for such widows to re-marry whenever they like. The story of Satyavati is enacted in hundreds of Hindu homes every day. The curse of every widow, who is burning within to re-marry but dare not for fear of a cruel custom, descends upon Hindu society so long as it keeps the widow under an unforgivable bondage.

LIBERATE THE WOMEN

"Men are undoubtedly to blame for their neglect, nay, their ill use of women, and they have to do adequate penance; but those women, who have shed superstition and have become conscious of the wrong, have to do the constructive work of reform."

Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the well-known social worker of Madras, has written a long letter, based on one of my Andhra speeches, from which I take the following interesting extract:

"Your observations on the urgent need for reforms and for a healthy change in the daily habits of our people, during your journey from Bezwada to Guntur, have appealed to me very much indeed.

"I may humbly submit that I as a medical woman fully concur with you. But will you kindly permit me to say that if education is really going to bring in its train social reform, better sanitation, and improved public health, it is going to achieve this result only through the education of our women?

"Under the present social system, don't you think that very few women are given sufficient opportunities for education, full development of body and mind, and self-expression?

"Don't you think that their very individuality is being recklessly crushed under the burden of customs and conventions?

"Does not early marriage strike at the root of all development—physical, intellectual, and even spiritual?

"Do not the pangs of child-wives and child-mothers, and the unmitigated sorrows of our widows and deserted wives demand an immediate remedy?

"Is the Hindu society justified in tolerating or conniving at a custom that in the name of religion condemns innocent young girls to a life of degradation and vice?

"Don't you think that as the result of social tyranny, Indian women, with a few exceptions, have lost the spirit of strength and courage, the power of independent thinking and initiative, which actuated the women of *ancient* India, such a Maitreyi,

Gargi, and Savitri, and even to-day actuate a large number of our own women belonging to the liberal creeds like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy, which is only Hinduism freed of all its meaningless customs, rites and rituals ?

"Should not the members of the Nationalist Party, we mean the Congress, burn with a desire and enthusiasm to find an immediate remedy for all these social evils, the source of our national weakness and the cause of our present degradation, or at least educate the masses to liberate their women from the servile bondage to which they are subject, that they may develop to their full physical, mental, moral and spiritual height, so that they may set an example of courage and wisdom, and, above all, that they may as wives and mothers rightly and truly fulfil the sacred task of training, guiding, and forming the daily habits and character of the future administrators of India ?

"If the members of the Congress believe that freedom is the birth-right of every nation and individual, and if they are determined to achieve that at any cost, should they not first liberate their women from the evil customs and conventions that restrict their all-round healthy growth, which remedy lies in their own hands ?

"Our poets, saints, and sages have sung in the same tune. Swami Vivekananda has said: 'That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race is so much degraded is that you had no respect for these living images of *Shakti*. If you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiments of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise.'

"The late Subramanya Bharati, the gifted Tamil poet, has echoed the same idea.

"So, would you kindly in your tour advise our men to follow the right and the surest way to attain freedom ?"

Dr. Muthulakshmi has a perfect right to expect Congressmen to shoulder this responsibility. Many Congressmen are doing great work in this direction, individually as also corporately. The root of the evil, however, lies far deeper than would appear on superficial observation. It is not the education merely of women that is at fault. It is the whole of our educational system that is rotten. Again, it is not this custom or that which needs condemnation, it is the inertia which refuses to

move even in the face of an admitted evil that needs to be removed. And lastly, the condemnation is true only of the middle class, the town dwellers, *i.e.*, barely 15 per cent of the vast millions of India. The masses living in the villages have no child-marriage, no prohibition against widow re-marriage. It is true that they have other evils which impede their growth. Inertia is common to both. What is, however, necessary is to overhaul the educational system, and to devise one in terms of the masses. No system will be even passable that does not lay stress on adult education, equally with that of children. Moreover, no system will touch even the fringe of the question that does not give the vernaculars their natural place of supremacy. This work can only be done through the existing educated class, such as it is. Before, therefore, reform on a large scale takes place, the mentality of the educated classes has to undergo transformation. And may I suggest to Dr. Muthulakshmi, that the few educated women we have in India will have to descend from their Western heights and come down to India's plains. Men are undoubtedly to blame for their neglect, nay, their ill use of women, and they have to do adequate penance, but those women who have shed superstition and have become conscious of the wrong have to do the constructive work of reform. This question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of untouchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like, resolve themselves into penetration into the villages, reconstruction or rather reformation of the village life.

OUR FALLEN SISTERS

"Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex."

The first occasion I had of meeting those women who earn their livelihood out of their shame, was at Coconada in the Andhra province. There, it was a few moments' interview with only half a dozen of them. The second occasion was at Barisal. Over one hundred of them met by appointment. They had sent a letter in advance, asking for an interview and telling me that they had become members of the Congress and subscribed to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, but could not understand my advice not to seek office in the various Congress Committees. They wound up by saying that they wished to seek my advice as to their future welfare. The gentleman, who handed me the letter, did so with great hesitation, not knowing whether I would be offended or pleased with the receipt of the letter. I put him at ease by assuring him that it was my duty to serve these sisters, if I could in any way.

For me, the two hours I passed with these sisters is a treasured memory. They told me that they were over 350 in the midst of a population of about 20,000 men, women and children. They represent the shame of the men of Barisal, and the sooner Barisal gets rid of it the better for its great name. And what is true of Barisal, is true, I fear, of every city. I mention Barisal, therefore, as an illustration. The credit of having thought of serving these sisters belongs to some young men of Barisal. Let me hope that Barisal will soon be able to claim

the credit, too, of having eradicated the evil.

Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as this abuse of the better half of humanity, to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for, it is even to-day the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. A woman's intuition has often proved truer than man's arrogant assumption of superior knowledge. There is method in putting Sita before Rama, and Radha before Krishna. Let us not delude ourselves into the belief that this gambling in vice has a place in our evolution, because it is rampant and in some cases even state-regulated in civilized Europe. Let us not also perpetuate the vice on the strength of Indian precedents. We should cease to grow the moment we cease to discriminate between virtue and vice, and slavishly copy the past which we do not fully know. We are proud heirs to all that was noblest and best in the by-gone age. We must not dishonour our heritage by multiplying past errors. In a self-respecting India, is not every woman's virtue as much every man's concern as his own sister's? *Swaraj* means ability to regard every inhabitant of India as our own brother or sister.

And so, as a man I hung my head in shame before these hundred sisters. Some were elderly, most were between twenty and thirty, and two or three were girls below twelve. Between them all, they told me, they had six girls and four boys, the eldest of whom was married to one of their own class. The girls were to be brought up to the same life as themselves, unless something else was possible. That these women should have considered their lot to be beyond repair, was like a stab in the living flesh. And yet, they were intelligent and modest. Their talk was dignified, their answers were clean and straight. And, for the moment, their determination was as firm as that of any *satyagrahi*. Eleven of them promised to give up their present life and take

to spinning and weaving from the following day, if they received a helping hand. The others said they would take time to think, for they did not wish to deceive me.

Here is work for the citizens of Barisal. Here is work for all true servants of India, men as well as women. If there are 350 unhappy sisters in a population of 20,000 there may be 5,250,000 in all India. But I flatter myself with the belief that four-fifths of the population of India, which live in the villages and are purely agricultural, are not touched by the vice. Th lowest figure for all India would, therefore, be 1,050,000 women living on the sale of their own honour. Before these unfortunate sisters could be weaned from their degradation, two conditions have to be fulfilled. We men must learn to control our passions, and these women should be found a calling that would enable them to earn an honourable living. The movement of Non-co-operation is nothing, if it does not purify us and restrain our evil passions. And, there is no occupation but spinning and weaving which all can take up without overcrowding. These sisters, the vast majority of them, need not think of marriage. They agreed that they could not. They must therefore, become the true *Sanyansinis* of India. Having no cares of life but of service, they can spin and weave to their heart's content. One million fifty thousand women diligently weaving every day for eight hours means that number of rupees per day for an impoverished India. These sisters told me they earned as much as two rupees per day. But, then, they admitted that they had many things needed to pander to man's lust, which they could discard when they took to spinning and weaving, reverting to a natural life. By the time I had finished with my interview they knew, without my telling them, why they could not be office-bearers in Congress Committees if they did not give up their sinfulness. None could officiate at the altar of *Swaraj* who did not approach it with pure hands and a pure heart.

OUR UNFORTUNATE SISTERS

"When woman, freed from man's snares, rises to the full height and rebels against man's legislation and institutions designed by him, her rebellion, no doubt non-violent, will be none the less effective."

Of all the addresses I received in the South, the most touching was one on behalf of the *Devadasis*—a euphemism for prostitutes. It was prepared and brought by people who belong to the clan from which these unfortunate sisters are drawn. I understood from the deputation that brought the address that reform from within was going on, but that the rate of progress was still slow. The gentleman who led the deputation told me that the public in general was apathetic to the reform. The first shock I received was at Coconada. And I did not mince matters when I spoke to the men of that place. The second was at Barisal, where I met a large number of these unfortunate sisters. Whether they be known as *Devadasis* or by any other name, the problem is the same. It is a matter of bitter shame and sorrow, of deep humiliation, that a number of women have to sell their chastity for man's lust. Man, the law-giver, will have to pay a dreadful penalty for the degradation he has imposed upon the so-called weaker sex. When woman, freed from man's snares, rises to the full height and rebels against man's legislation and institutions designed by him, her rebellion, no doubt non-violent, will be none the less effective. Let the Indian man ponder over the fate of the thousands of sisters who are destined to a life of shame for his unlawful and immoral indulgence. The pity of it is that the vast majority of the men, who visit these pestilential haunts, are married men and, there-

fore, commit a double sin. They sin against their wives to whom they have sworn allegiance, and they sin against the sisters whose purity they are bound to guard with as much jealousy as that of their own blood sisters. It is an evil which cannot last for a single day, if we men of India realize our own dignity.

If many of the most respectable among us were not steeped in the vice, this kind of indulgence would be regarded as a greater crime than the stealing of a banana by a hungry man, or the picking of a pocket by a youngster who is in need of money. What is worse and more hurtful to society—to steal property, or to steal the honour of a woman ? Let me not be told that the public woman is party to the sale of her honour, but not the millionaire on the race-course whose pocket is picked by a professional pickpocket. Who is worse—an urchin who picks a pocket, or a scoundrel who drugs his victim and then makes him sign away the whole of his property ? Does not man, by his subtle and unscrupulous ways, first rob woman of her noblest instinct and then make her partner in the crime committed against her ? Or, are some women, like *Panchamas*, born to a life of degradation ? I ask every young man, married or unmarried, to contemplate the implications of what I have written. I cannot write all I have learnt about this social disease, this moral leprosy. Let his imagination fill in the rest and then let him recoil with horror and shame from the sin, if he has himself been guilty of it. And let every pure man, wherever he is, do what he can to purify his neighbourhood. I know that the second part is easier written than practised. It is a delicate matter. But for its very delicacy it demands the attention of all thoughtful men. Work among the unfortunate sisters must be left everywhere to experts. My suggestion has reference to work among the visitors to these houses of ill-fame.

AN APPEAL TO THE INDIAN WOMEN

"The future of India lies on your knees, for you will nurture the future generation. You can bring up the children of India to become simple, God-fearing and brave men and women, or you can coddle them to be weaklings, unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign fineries which they would find it difficult in after-life to discard."

Gandhiji issued the following appeal to the Women of India in prosecution of his campaign for boycott of foreign cloth:

Dear Sisters,

The All-India Congress Committee has come to a momentous decision in fixing the 30th September next as the final date for completing the boycott of foreign cloth begun by the sacrificial fire lit on the 31st July in Bombay in memory of Lokamanya Tilak. I was accorded the privilege of setting fire to the huge pile containing costly *saris* and other dresses, which you have hitherto considered fine and beautiful. I feel that it was right and wise on the part of sisters who gave their costly clothing. Its destruction was the most economical use you could have made of it, even as destruction of plague-infected articles is their most economical and best use. It was a necessary surgical operation designed to avert more serious complaints in the body politic.

The women of India have, during the past twelve months, worked wonders on behalf of the Motherland. You have silently worked away as angels of mercy. You have parted with your cash and your fine jewellery. You have wandered from house to house to make collections. Some of you have even assisted in picketing.

Some of you who were used to fine dresses of variegated colours and had a number of changes during the day, have now adopted the white and spotless but heavy *khadi sari*, reminding one of woman's innate purity. You have done all this for the sake of India, for the sake of the *Khilafat*, for the sake of the Punjab. There is no guile about your word or work. Yours is the purest sacrifice untainted by anger or hate. Let me confess to you that your spontaneous and loving response all over India has convinced me that God is with us. No other proof of our struggle being one of self-purification is needed than that lacs of India's women are actively helping it.

Having given much, more is now required of you. Men bore the principal share of the subscriptions to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. But completion of the *Swadeshi* programme is possible only if you give the largest share. Boycott is impossible, *unless you will surrender the whole of your foreign clothing*. So long as the taste persists, so long is complete renunciation impossible. And boycott means complete renunciation. We must be prepared to be satisfied with such cloth as India can produce, even as we are thankfully content with such children as God gives us. I have not known a mother throwing away her baby, even though it may appear ugly to an outsider. So should it be with the patriotic women of India about Indian manufactures. And for you, only hand-spun and hand-woven can be regarded as Indian manufactures. During the transition stage you can only get coarse *khadi* in abundance. You may add all the art to it that your taste allows or requires. And if you will be satisfied with coarse *khadi* for a few months, India need not despair of seeing a revival of the fine, rich and coloured garments of old which were once the envy and the despair of the world. I assure you that a six months' course of self-denial will show you that what we to-day regard as artistic is only falsely so, and that true art takes note not merely of form but also of what lies behind. There is an art that

kills and an art that gives life. The fine fabric that we have imported from the West or the Far East has literally killed millions of our brothers and sisters, and delivered thousands of our dear sisters to a life of shame. True art must be evidence of happiness, contentment and purity of its authors. And if you will have such art revived in our midst, the use of *khadi* is obligatory on the best of you at the present moment.

And not only is the use of *khadi* necessary for the success of the *Swadeshi* programme, but it is imperative for everyone of you to spin during your leisure hours. I have suggested to boys and men also that they should spin. Thousands of them, I know, are spinning daily. But the main burden of spinning must, as of old, fall on your shoulders. Two hundred years ago, the women of India spun not only for home demand but also for foreign lands. They spun not merely coarse counts, but the finest that the world has ever spun. No machine has yet reached the fineness of the yarn spun by our ancestors. If, then, we are to cope with the demand for *khadi* during two months and afterwards, you must form spinning-clubs, institute spinning competitions and flood the Indian market with hand-spun yarn. For this purpose, some of you have to become experts in spinning, carding and adjusting the spinning wheels. This means ceaseless toil. You will not look upon spinning as a means of livelihood. For the middle class, it should supplement the income of the family; and for very poor women, it is undoubtedly a means of livelihood. The spinning wheel should be, as it was, the widow's loving companion. But, for you who will read this appeal, it is presented as a duty, as *dharma*. If all the well-to-do women of India were to spin a certain quantity daily, they would make yarn cheap and bring about much more quickly than otherwise the required fineness.

The economic and the moral salvation of India thus rests mainly with you. The future of India lies on your knees, for you will nurture the future generation. You

can bring up the children of India to become simple, God-fearing and brave men and women, or you can coddle them to be weaklings, unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign fineries which they would find it difficult in after-life to discard. The next few weeks will show of what stuff the women of India are made. I have not the shadow of a doubt as to your choice. The destiny of India is far safer in your hands than in the hands of a Government that has so exploited India's resouces that she has lost faith in herself. At everyone of women's meetings, I have asked for your blessings for the national effort, and I have done so in the belief that you are pure, simple and godly enough to give them with effect. You can ensure the fruitfulness of your blessings by giving up your foreign cloth, and during your spare hours by ceaselessly spinning for the nation.

I remain,
Your devoted brother,
M. K. Gandhi

WOMEN'S PART

"Let it be man's privilege to protect woman, but let no woman of India feel helpless in the absence of man or in the event of his failing to perform the sacred duty of protecting her."

The women of Calcutta have obstructed the gentlemen of Calcutta by trying to sell *khadi*, and a telegram in the newspapers has announced that they have been consequently arrested. The company includes the devoted partner of the President-elect (Deshbandhu C. R. Das), his widowed sister and his niece. I had hoped that in the initial stages, at any rate, women would be spared the honour of going to gaol. They were not to become aggressive civil resisters. But the Bengal Government, in their impartial zeal to make no distinction even of sex, have conferred the honour upon three women of Calcutta. I hope that the whole country will welcome this innovation. The women of India should have as much share in winning *Swaraj* as men. Probably, in this peaceful struggle, woman can outdistance man by many a mile. We know that she is any day superior to man in her religious devotion. Silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex, and now that the Government of Bengal have dragged the woman into the line of fire, I hope that the women all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves. In any case, they were bound, when a sufficient number of men had been removed, for the honour of their sex, to step into their places. But now let it be side by side with men in sharing the hardships of gaol life. God will protect their honour. When, as if to mock man, her natural protectors became helpless to prevent Draupadi from being denuded of her last piece of cloth, the power of her own virtue preserved

her honour. And so will it be to the end of time. Even the weakest physically have been given the ability to protect their own honour. Let it be man's privilege to protect woman, but let no woman of India feel helpless in the absence of man or in the event of his failing to perform the sacred duty of protecting her. One who knows how to die need never fear any harm to her or his honour.

I would suggest to the women of India, quietly but without loss of time, to collect names of those who are ready to enter the line of fire. Let them send their offer to the women of Bengal, and let the latter feel that their sisters elsewhere are ready to follow their noble example. It is likely that there will not be many forthcoming to brave the risks of a gaol life and all it must mean to women. The nation will have no cause to be ashamed, if only a few offer themselves for sacrifice in the first instance.

SWARAJ THROUGH WOMEN

"Equality of the sexes does not mean equality of occupation. There may be no legal bar against a woman hunting or wielding a lance. But she instinctively recoils from a function that belongs to man. Nature has created sexes as complements of each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms."

Now that the Working Committee has accepted spinning as an indispensable condition of civil disobedience, the women of India have a rare opportunity of serving the country. The Salt Campaign brought out tens of thousands from their seclusion, and showed that they could serve the country on equal terms with men. It gave the village woman a dignity which she had never enjoyed before. The restoration of spinning to its central place in India's peaceful campaign for deliverance from the Imperial yoke, gives her women a special status. In spinning, they have a natural advantage over men.

Since the beginning of time , there has been a division of labour between men and women. Adam wove and Eve span. The distinction persists to the present day. Men spinners are an exception. In the Punjab, when during 1920-21 I asked men to spin, they used to tell me that men considered spinning to be beneath their dignity and that it was solely women's occupation. Men nowadays do not object on the ground of dignity. There are thousands who spin for sacrifice. It was when men took up spinning from a patriotic motive that spinning was reduced to a science, and inventions as great as in another field were made. Nevertheless, experience shows that spinning will remain woman's speciality. I believe there is a good reason behind the experience. Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively silent process.

Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and, therefore, non-violence. Her occupations must, therefore, be, as they are, more conducive to peace than war. That she is now being dragged down for purposes of violent war, is no credit to modern civilization. I have no doubt that violence so ill becomes woman that presently she will rebel against the violence of her fundamental nature. I feel that man, too, will repent of his folly. Equality of the sexes does not mean equality of occupations. There may be no legal bar against a woman hunting or wielding a lance. But she instinctively recoils from a function that belongs to man. Nature has created sexes as complements to each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms.

But a proof of the different functions of the sexes is unnecessary for my purpose. The fact stands, at any rate in India, that millions of women regard spinning as their natural occupation. The Working Committee's resolution automatically shifts the burden from men to women, and gives to them an opportunity of showing their mettle. I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. If the fight came, I should then approach it with much greater confidence than if men predominated. I would dread the latter's violence. Women would be my guarantee against such an outbreak.

SPINNING WHEEL AND WOMEN

"It is for the women of India, a large number of whom do not get even an anna per day, that I am going about the country with my spinning wheel and my begging bowl."

In the course of a talk on khadi *in Bihar, drawing attention of the audience to the charts of daily income per head in different countries of the world, Gandhiji said :*

Look how this long strip of red representing the *per capita* income of U.S.A. compares with the little speck which represents that of India. Whereas the one is over Rs. 14 per day, the other is 1½ anna per day. Compare the income of other countries—England, France, Japan, which are respectively Rs. 7, 6 and 5 per day. And even this 1½ anna per day is the average. The actual income of the vast majority of our poor people would be still less, if you were to keep out of account the income of salaried ministers and executive councillors, of a few barristers and fewer millionaires. I ask you, in all humility, to suggest some way wherewith you can supplement this scanty income. I have been asking one and all but without avail. As a result of hard thinking, and living in contact with the millions during recent years, I have suggested the *charkha* as the only means calculated to supplement this income.

He, then, took the khadi *production and sale charts and showed the steady and rapid increase in production in Bihar and drew attention to the slow pace at which sales were going up.*

This production means Rs. 30,000 distributed to 30,000 of the poor women of Bihar. Come with me to the *khadi* centres of Darbhanga, and see the joy and happiness the *charkha* has brought to those Hindu and Mus-

salman women. If it cannot give work to more, it is not my fault but yours. If you do not care to purchase the products of their hands, the work cannot progress. Every yard of *khaddar* you purchase means a few coppers in the hands of those women. A few coppers and not more. But it means a few coppers where none was carried before. I saw the fallen women in Rajahmundry and Barisal. A young girl came and said to me: 'Gandhi, what can your *charkha* give us? The men who come to us pay Rs. 5 to 10 for a few minutes.' I said to her the *charkha* could not give them that, but if they renounced the life of shame I could arrange to teach them spinning and weaving and help them to earn a decent living. As I listened to that girl my heart sank within me, and I asked God why I was also not born a woman. But if I was not born a woman I can become a woman, and it is for the women of India, a large number of whom do not get even an anna per day, that I am going about the country with my spinning wheel and my begging bowl.

"And if this old woman, who for her industry is young at 75, finds her solace, not her livelihood, in the wheel and the loom, how much greater is their need in this land where very few women reach the age of 75, where the majority needlessly *are* old at 50, and where millions of women need, not merely the solace of an innocent cottage industry to occupy their idle hours, but need it even more to keep the wolf from the door."

An English friend writes:

"I want just to tell you of a letter and photographs I have had from a dear old Swiss peasant woman of over 70, who spins and weaves away up in the mountains above Villeneuve. She writes in answer to letters that she has had of mine, and then she says (in French dialect): 'We are commencing the winter and the snows are coming down to keep us company for many months. I shall have plenty of time to occupy myself with my loom. And I have now got an order for 2 pieces at 59 metres, so I shall need the time, as I get tired easily in these days (being 75 years old!).' Her life is a perfect example of the full, yet peaceful and contented existence, which should be the lot of all peasantry. In the summer she works in the fields, with just a few odd hours of spinning and weaving put in here and there when the days are wet, and in the winter when the land is under snow, she works away at her wheel and her loom all day. Take this hand-industry away from her, and she would be lost in complete misery. As it is, she is the happiest and sweetest-natured person on the mountain side. Why? Because she alone, of all the peasants in that place, has retained the old industry, and she alone has a full and true life. I enclose you one of the little photographs which shows her sitting on a log of wood caressing one of her goats, which may give you some slight idea of her dear old face. The younger woman is her daughter-in-law."

I have the beautiful photograph which I am unable to reproduce in *Young India*, but the imaginative reader will have no difficulty in filling in the picture. The point

of the letter, however, is that even in that machine-ridden country, there are people who find their true peace in this at one time universal home industry of the wheel and the loom. And if this old woman, who for her industry is young at 75, finds her solace, not her livelihood, in the wheel and the loom, how much greater is their need in this land where very few women reach the age of 75, where the majority needlessly *are* old at 50, and where millions of women need, not merely the solace of an innocent cottage industry to occupy their idle hours, but need it even more to keep the wolf from the door?

'If that is so, why do not the millions take to the home industry, even as the dear Old Swiss sister does, and find from it their solace and their food? What is there to prevent them from doing so?'—asks the ignorant scoffer. But somewhat similar was the question put by a burly, rough-looking Englishman to Surendranath Banerji in 1889 or 1890, when he was haranguing an English audience. This worthy member of the firm of John Bull and Company asked the then uncrowned King of Bengal, if what the latter said was true that India desired freedom, what prevented her from taking it, how was it that they, members of this numerous and powerful firm, never heard of breaking of window-panes, let alone heads, as they, the members, were wont to do when they could not get what they wanted? So far as my memory serves me right, the papers recorded no answer from the orator. There was only a 'hear, hear,' from the audience. But what the honest Englishman said to Surendranath may be safely repeated even to-day, and we know that such a question will be no answer to the cry for freedom. We may not know how to win it. Knowing the way, we may not have the power or the will to adopt it. Nevertheless, the cry for freedom is both just and natural. Be it ever so ineffective, it is the first step to freedom.

In the instance of the starving millions, the scoffers forget in their ignorance that the millions have not even the wish to cry out for work or bread. Hence, we join

the English historian in calling them 'dumb millions.' *We* (including the scoffers) have to be their voice. We have to teach the dumb millions the first lesson. *We*, not *they*, are responsible for their awful poverty and ignorance. They don't know what they want or need. They are living corpses.

Who shall dare say to the untouchables that if they want their freedom, who prevents them from taking it? God is long-suffering and patient. He lets the tyrant dig his own grave, only issuing grave warnings at stated intervals.

We would say, and justly, that though the taunt of the Englishman could be theoretically justified, it would ill become Englishmen to beg the question in that manner when any one of us, though feeling helpless, is yet expressing the natural desire for freedom. So will it ill become us, middle class men and women, to hurl the taunt, put by me in the mouth of the imaginary scoffer, in answer to the crying need of the millions—a need which they may not even feel, but which a few of us feel for them. The way to answer the need is to multiply the number of such representatives who would not only be the mouth-piece of the dumb millions, but would adopt corresponding measures by themselves taking up the wheel, by throwing away foreign fineries, by wearing *khadi*, and by not resting till every idle hour of the nation is usefully occupied. Then, but not till then, shall India's women be young, happy and God-fearing at 75, even as the Swiss sister of 75 is represented to be.

A SISTER'S DIFFICULTY

"*Swadeshi* does not mean drowning oneself in one's own little puddle, but making it tributary to the ocean, that is, the nation. And, it can claim to contribute to the ocean only if it is and keeps itself pure."

A sister writes:

"A year ago, I heard you speaking on the supreme necessity of every one of us wearing *khadi*, and thereupon decided to adopt it. But we are poor people. My husband says that *khadi* is costly. Belonging as I do to Maharashtra, I wear a *sari* 9 yards long. Now, if I reduce the length of my *sari* to 6 yards, there would be great saving, but the elders will not hear of any such reduction. I reason with them that wearing *khadi* is the more important thing and that the style and length of the *sari* are absolutely immaterial, but in vain. They say that it is my youth that puts all these new-fangled notions into my head. But I expect they will agree to the proposed reduction in length if you are good enough to write to me, saying that *khadi* ought to be used, even at the cost of the style of clothing."

I have sent the desired reply to the sister. But I take note of her difficulty here, as I know that the same difficulty is encountered by many other sisters as well.

The letter in question bears witness to the strong patriotic feeling of the writer, for there are not many sisters who, like her, are ready to give up old styles or old customs on their own initiative. The number of such sisters and brothers is legion as would gladly have *Swaraj* if it could be attained without suffering any discomfort or incurring any expenditure, and in spite of their sticking to old customs regardless of their propriety or the reverse. But *Swaraj* is not such a cheap commodity. To attain *Swaraj* implies the cultivation of a spirit of self-sacrifice, including the sacrifice of provincialism.

Provincialism is a bar not only to the realization of national *Swaraj*, but also the achievement of provincial autonomy. Women, perhaps, are more responsible than men for keeping up this narrow spirit. Variety is worth cherishing up to a certain limit, but if the limit is exceeded, amenities and customs, masquerading under the name of variety, are subversive of nationalism. The Deccani *sari* is a thing of beauty, but the beauty must be let go if it can be secured only by sacrificing the nation. We should consider the Cutchi style of short *sari* or the Punjabi *odhni* to be really artistic, if the wearing of *khadi* can be cheapened and facilitated by their means. The Deccani, Gujarati, Cutchi and Bengali styles of wearing *sari* are all of them various national styles, and each of them is as national as the rest. Such being the case, preference should be accorded to that style which requires the smallest amount of cloth, consistently with the demands of decency. Such is the Cutchi style, which takes up only 3 yards of cloth, that is, about half the length of the Gujarati *sari*, not to mention the saving of trouble in having to carry a smaller weight. If the *pachhedo* and the petticoat are of the same colour, one cannot at once make out whether it is only a *pachhedo* or full *sari*. The mutual exchange and imitation of such national styles is eminently desirable.

Well-to-do people might well keep in their wardrobes all possible provincial styles of clothing. It would be very courteous and patriotic on the part of a Gujarati host and hostess to put on the Bengali style of dress when they entertain Bengali guests, and *vice versa*. But such procedure is open only to the patriotic rich. Patriotic people of the middle and poorer classes should take pride in adopting that particular provincial style which cheapens as well as facilitates the wearing of *khadi*. And even there, they should fix their eye upon the clothing style of the poorest of the poor.

Swadeshi does not mean drowning oneself in one's own little puddle, but making it tributary to the ocean, that

is, the nation. And, it can claim to contribute to the ocean only if it is and keeps itself pure. It is, therefore, clear that only such local or provincial customs should have a nation-wide vogue as are not impure or immoral. And when once this truth is grasped, nationalism is transmuted into the enthusiasm of humanity.

What is true of clothing is equally true of language, food, etc. As we might imitate the dress of other provinces on a suitable occasion, so might we utilize the language and other things. But at present all our energy is wasted in the useless, impossible and fatal attempt to give English the pride of place to the neglect, conscious or unconscious, of our mother-tongue, and all the more so, of the languages of other provinces.

OF TAMIL WOMEN

"Certainly, God will be better pleased with those who wear the spotless *khadi sari* as symbol of the inner purity than with those who are gaudily dressed."

A friend writes from Tirupati:

"The greatest obstacle in the way of success of our movement[1] in Madras are our women. Some of them are very reactionary, and a very large number of the high class Brahman ladies have become addicted to many of the Western vices. They drink coffee not less than three times a day, and consider it very fashionable to drink more. In dress they are no better, they have given up the homely cheap cloth and are running after costly foreign cloth. In the matter of jewels, Brahman ladies excel all others. Among Brahmans, Shri Vaishnava ladies are the worst sinners. When men are trying to return to a purer life, our ladies are becoming extravagant. While going to temples to worship God, they cannot think of a plain, simple dress. They should wear the costliest jewels available, and still more costly laces. I know of many honest women, who refuse to go to temples because they have not got rich clothes and costly jewels."

I am loth to think that what the friend, who is himself a non-co-operating Vaishnava pleader, says is all true. And I am inclined to disbelieve the statement that the Tamil sisters are worse than the rest in the matter of love of gaudiness. All the same, his letter ought to serve as a warning to the Tamil sisters. They must revert to the original simplicity, and certainly God will be better pleased with those who wear the spotless *khadi sari* as a symbol of the inner purity than with those who are gaudily dressed. Our temples are not meant for show, but for expression of humility and simplicity which

[1] Non-co-operation Movement.

are typical of a devotional mood. There should be a continuous propaganda amongst women in the Madras Presidency with reference to the evil complained of.

TAMIL SISTERS AGAIN

"In the melting plains of Madras and Andhra, I can imagine no industry so helpful as the gentle-moving *charkha*."

A South Indian lawyer sends me the following note:

"*Khadi* is not as widely used in the Tamil province as in the other provinces, mainly because the women-folk do not wear it. The spinning wheel is not much in evidence for the same reason. Plain white cannot be worn by married women here. They can only wear dyed *saris*. In former times, cotton was the only wear of ladies. Now, except by the poorest, cotton *saris* are discarded and silk *saris* form the daily wear. Silk *saris* were, at first, locally manufactured at Koranadu (near Mayavaram), and later on at Conjeevaram, and dyed with Indian dyes. They cost from Rs. 10 to 30. They were only occasionally used. Lately, the market has been exclusively captured by Bangalore *saris* dyed with German or English dyes, the least of which costs about Rs. 50. This presses on the poor Brahman householder, specially as he has to clothe the members of his family only with these; and when it is the daily wear, he has to go in for a number of them. On marriage occasions, the minimum cost of a *sari* fit for presentation is above Rs. 100. Many a decent family is ruined by a marriage, mostly on this account. This ruinous habit, which was confined to the Brahmans, has spread among other classes also.

"Besides the question of expense, there is the other aspect of comfort and convenience. Silk is non-absorbing and heavy, and working or cooking in it is martyrdom. It is always hot here, except for one or two months of the year. There is also the peculiar insanitary habit of not washing more the costly *saris*, lest they should lose colour and get crimpled. The perspiration and smell emitted are awful.

"Many a householder on the verge of ruin would feel grateful to you if you would bring about a return to economy, simplicity and comfort."

I share the correspondent's feeling that the Tamil woman is over-fond of her silk *sari*. There is no more

unwholesome garment than silk in a hot climate like that of Madras. And, one hundred rupees for a *sari* is a criminal waste of money in a poor country like India. Men are no better, for they are proud of their hand-woven *pugris, dhotis* and *uparnas,* little thinking that the yarn used for these things is all foreign. Strange as it may appear, absorbent *khadi* is cooler than the fine garments which are so prized by men. I am hoping however, that my faith in the spirituality of Tamilians will be realized even in the difficult matter of *Swadeshi,* and that they will perceive the spiritual necessity of complete renunciation of foreign cloth and return to the *charkha*. In the melting plains of Madras and Andhra, I can imagine no industry so helpful as the gentle-moving *charkha*. Dravida land is responsible for sending out the largest number of emigrants to a life of servility and exile. Restoration of the *charkha* automatically solves that difficult problem of enforced emigration. Land alone cannot support the poor peasantry of India, even if there was no assessment to be paid.

A GOOD SERVANT GONE

"I doubt not that many young men and young women will have to imitate this good woman, and die martyrs to duty before India becomes once more holy and free, as millions believe her to have been in ancient times."

It was in 1921, at Bezwada, that at a great ladies' meeting I saw the only *khaddar*-clad girl present there, taking charge of the meeting, keeping order, and moving about with energy and decision. She was the first to give up, so far as I can remember, all her rich ornaments, bangles and a heavy gold chain. "Have you got the permission of your parents ?", I asked her, as she was delivering all the ornaments to me. "My parents do not interfere with me and they let me do as I like," she replied. Annapurna Devi spoke English fluently. She had received her education at Bethune College in Calcutta. She went out amongst the huge mass of ladies for collections and brought ornaments and money. Ever since then she kept herself in touch with the movement—in fact, dedicated herself to it. She was captain of lady volunteers at Coconada, and many have described in glowing terms her wonderful work at the time. Unfortunately, even at this time she was not in robust health. She was married to Sjt. Magunti Bapi Needu, B. Sc. Whilst at Coimbatore, I suddenly received a telegram, several days after her death, that she was no more. And now I have a letter from Sjt. Needu, from which I take the following extracts:

"At last the expected blow has fallen. It is my misfortune that my first letter should carry the shocking news of the premature death of your favourite worker and my partner, Annapurna. When we both paid our respectful visit to you at Srinivasa Iyengar's house, during your last Madras tour, I distinctly remem-

ber, you asked me to keep you in touch about her health and advised me to send her to Ahmedabad for treatment. But I did not like to worry you about her health. Your instructions to us, to me to be her best nurse, to her to keep her courage and take particular care of her health, we implicitly followed. What was humanly possible I did but in vain.

"In her, you find one of the typical wrecks of your Non-co-operation movement. She gave her all to the country—her jewels, even her wedding ring which I presented her after my return—marriage property, best clothes, fine fashions, literary pursuits, her health and now her life.

"It was her implicit faith in you that made her blindly follow your *Health Guide*. Under your unbalanced fruit diet, which she religiously followed for six months, her healthy constitution began to break down, never to recover.

"Mahatmaji, I cannot be so cruel as to accuse you, but I am merely stating the fact. She much neglected her health during her propaganda work in the N. C. O. movement. It was too late when she realized her sin which cost her her life. You wrote in one letter to her: 'I knew always that you would most zealously work for *khaddar*.' After my return from the United States the first request she made to me, falling at my feet, was to promise to wear *khaddar*. My suits, shirts, shorts and other foreign clothes no more I could claim as my own. I was not even allowed to find place for them in her home at Ellore. In one of her American letters, she mentioned her vow to boycott foreign cloth and her resolve to stick to *khaddar* for life. She did succeed. It is now left for me to respect the other half of the vow. She did not leave *khaddar* even when she was literally reduced to mere skin and bone, with bed sores caused by thick *khaddar saris*. She was fortunate to be cremated with *khaddar* on (as is the custom in my community). Perhaps she was anxious to introduce it in the other world, too!

"Her message on the eve of my departure to U. S. A. was: 'You may even forget me; but never forget your mother country.' Once she was remarking to me, that if at all she had any desire to get rid of her chronic illness, it was for the country's cause, not for her husband's service. It is this ambition that gave her will to live for months when we all gave up hopes. To the end she was hopeful; even at the last moment, on getting consciousness after injections, she was challenging the doctor that she would live, never die. She did live to die and died to live for the country.

"Her unpublished works on women, translations of Ramakrishna's teachings from Bengali and some of her letters we mean giving due publicity to.

willingly supported *khadi* and therethrough the cause of the poor from whom, after all, as my correspondent correctly puts it, they derive their riches. It is true that *khadi* has a political significance, but we have not yet come to the stage when support of *khadi* can be safely declared by the Government to be criminal. Every philanthropic movement can be turned to political use, but it would be a sad day when on that account it is boycotted even as to its philanthropic aspect. But it is only fair to state that the Raja, to whom reference has been made by the lady doctor, is not the only one who is afraid of supporting *khadi* or showing ordinary courtesy to a public servant like me. It is well, however, that the Raja's boycott of me has stimulated the gift. But I would like all sisters, who may chance to see this note, to realize that it is not necessary to be able to emulate the fair donor, to have occasions like the one that set her a-thinking about her duty to the starving millions. Surely, it is easy enough to realize that so long as there are millions of men and women in the country starving for want of food because of want of work, the sisters have no warrant for possessing costly jewels for adorning their bodies, or often for the mere satisfaction of possessing them. As I have remarked before now, if only the rich ladies of India will discard their superfluities and be satisfied with such decoration as *khadi* can give them, it is possible to finance the whole of the *khadi* movement, not to take into consideration the tremendous moral effect that such a step on the part of the rich daughters of India will produce upon the nation, and particularly the starving masses.

WOMEN AND JEWELLERY

"In this country of semi-starvation of millions and insufficient nutrition of practically eighty per cent of the people, the wearing of jewellery is an offence to the eye."

I have seen a paragraph in a newspaper adversely criticizing my appeal to the women for gifts of jewellery, and my auctioning things received as donations. Indeed, I would like the thousands of sisters who attend my meetings to give me most, if not all, of the jewellery they wear. In this country of semi-starvation of millions and insufficient nutrition of practically eighty per cent of the people, the wearing of jewellery is an offence to the eye. A woman in India has rarely any cash which she can call her own. But the jewellery she wears does belong to her, though even that she will not, dare not, give away, without the consent of her lord and master. It ennobles her to part with, for good cause, something she calls her own. Moreover, most of this jewellery has no pretension to art; some of it is positively ugly and a harbinger of dirt. Such are anklets, heavy necklaces, clasps worn not for adjusting the hair, but purely as a decoration for unkempt, unwashed and often evil-smelling hair, or row upon row of bangles from wrist to elbow. In my opinion, the wearing of expensive jewellery is a distinct loss to the country. It is so much capital locked up, or, worse still, allowed to wear away. And in this movement of self-purification[1], the surrender of jewellery by women or men I hold to be a distinct benefit to society. Those who give, do so gladly. My invariable condition is that on no account should the

[1] Harijan Movement.

jewellery donated be replaced. Indeed, women have blessed me for inducing them to part with things which had enslaved them. And, in not a few cases, men have thanked me for being an instrument for bringing simplicity into their homes.

TO THE SINHALESE WOMEN

"If you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourselves for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything."

At a meeting of fashionable Sinhalese ladies in Colombo, Gandhiji drew a picture of the starving millions of India and said:

When Mahendra came to Ceylon the children of the motherland were not starving either materially or spiritually, our star was in the ascendant and you partook of the glory. The children are starving to-day and it is on their behalf that I have come with the begging bowl, and if you do not disown kinship with them, but take some pride in it, then you must give me not only your money but your jewellery, as sisters in so many other places have done. My hungry eyes rest upon the ornaments of sisters, whenever I see them heavily bedecked. There is an ulterior motive, too, in asking for ornaments *viz.*, to wean the ladies from the craze for ornaments and jewellery. And if I may take the liberty that I do with other sisters, may I ask you what it is that makes woman deck herself more than man? I am told by feminine friends that she does so for pleasing man. Well, I tell you if you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourselves for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything. I have mentally become a woman in order to steal into her heart. I could not steal into my wife's heart until I decided to treat her differently than I used to do, and so I restored to her all her rights by dis-

possessing myself of all my so-called rights as her husband. And you see her to-day as simple as myself. You find no necklaces, no fineries on her. I want you to be like that. Refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies, and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourselves, don't go in for scents and lavender waters; if you want to give out the proper scent, it must come out of your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birth-right. Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again.

And he cited for them the example of Sita, defiant in her purity, and Miss Schlesin who with her defiant purity and innate fearlessness commanded in South Africa the adoration of thousands, including amongst them fierce Pathans, robbers, and questionable characters, and rounded off by telling them wherein true honour lies.

Do you know the hideous condition of your sisters on plantations? Treat them as your sisters, go amongst them and serve them with your better knowledge of sanitation and your talents. Let your honour lie in their service. And, is there not service nearer home? There are men who are rascals; drunken people who are a menace to society. Wean them from their rascality by going amongst them as fearlessly as some of those Salvation Army girls who go into the dens of thieves and gamblers and drunkards, fall on their necks and at their feet, and bring them round. That service will deck you more than the fineries that you are wearing. I will, then, be a trustee for the money that you will save and distribute it amongst the poor.

I pray that the rambling message that I have given you may find a lodgment in your hearts.

MAKE A DEFINITE SACRIFICE

"The Harijan cause is like fire. The more *ghee* you put into fire, the more it requires. Those who give to the cause gain, they never lose: and those who do not give, undoubtedly lose. What you gain by giving is merit. What you lose by not giving is yourself."

During the course of Gandhiji's Harijan tour, at Madras, a girl gave him a five-rupee note for his autograph.

"No," said Gandhiji, "a bangle." The girl took off two bangles and also gave the five-rupee note.

"Have you your parents' permission to give this away? Take away the bangles, if you like."

The girl took back one bangle, saying she would keep it as a memento.

"Won't you ask your parents to give a new bangle?"

"No," came the emphatic reply.

"Then, let me have it." And the girl went off smiling.

Another girl said: "How can I give anything without my father's permission?"

"You may not," said Gandhiji, "but does your father claim all the freedom for himself and give you none?"

A newly married girl said: "I will give you money but not my jewellery. For, if I give away any jewellery, I am sure to have it replaced, which you would not like. I shall give you jewellery only when I am prepared to give it away for good."

"You are right," said Gandhiji, "I do not want your money. Money I can have from your father for the asking. I want from you your jewellery. The condition is that it should not be replaced. I will patiently

wait for the day when you will voluntarily come and put into my hands your jewellery."

At Vizagapatam, his call to the women for some definite sacrifice was couched in words charged with the deepest emotion. He said:

"The Harijan cause is like fire. The more *ghee* you put into fire, the more it requires. So also the more you give to the Harijan cause, the more it requires. Those who give to the cause gain, they never lose: and those who do not give, undoubtedly lose. What you gain by giving is merit. What you lose by not giving is yourself. For, men and women belonging to *savarna* Hindu castes have been persecuting Harijans now for ages. And if we are just now passing through evil times, I am convinced that our treatment of Harijans has not a little to do with it. I have, therefore, been asking the women of India to drive away the ghost of untouchability from their hearts. It is wrong, it is sinful, to consider some people lower than ourselves. On God's earth nobody is low and nobody is high. We are all His creatures; and just as in the eyes of parents all their children are absolutely equal, so also in God's eyes all His creatures must be equal. Therefore, I ask you to believe me when I tell you that there is no sanction in religion for untouchability. I would, therefore, ask you to give a place in your hearts to all Harijans around you. Welcome Harijan children in your own homes. Go to Harijan quarters and look after their children and their homes; speak to Harijan women as to your own sisters.

This cause of Harijans is essentially for the women of India to tackle, and I hope that you, the Hindu women of this place, will do your duty. I hope those of you who have the wish and ability to surrender all or any part of your jewellery, will do so. There is one condition attached to the gift. If you give anything whatsoever, it must not be replaced. I want you to feel that you personally have given something to this cause, which you cannot do when you give rupees and notes. For, they

come from either your parents or your husbands. But jewellery is your own property. When you surrender your jewellery without any intention of having it replaced by your parents or husbands, it is definitely your own sacrifice. I want you all, who have understood the spirit of the message I have delivered to you, to make that definite sacrifice."—C. S.

REAL ORNAMENT OF WOMAN

"The real ornament of woman is her character, her purity. Metal and stones can never be real ornaments. The names of women like Sita and Damayanti have become sacred to us for their unsullied virtue, never for their jewellery, if they wore any."

Addressing a women's gathering at Mysore in course of the Harijan tour, Gandhiji said:

"The real ornament of woman is her character, her purity. Metal and stones can never be real ornaments. The names of women like Sita and Damayanti have become sacred to us for their unsullied virtue, never for their jewellery, if they wore any. My asking from you your jewellery has also a wider significance. Several sisters have told me that they feel all the better for getting rid of their jewels. "I have called this," he said before another meeting, "an act of merit in more ways than one. No man or woman is entitled to the possession of wealth, unless he or she has given a fair share of it to the poor and the helpless. It is a social and religious obligation and has been called a sacrifice by the Bhagavad Gita. He who does not offer this sacrifice has been called a thief. The Gita has enumerated many forms of sacrifice; but what greater sacrifice can there be than to serve the poor and the needy? For us to-day there can be no sacrifice higher than to forget the distinctions of high and low, and to realize the equality of all men. I also wish to bring home to the women of India that real ornamentation lies, not in loading the body with metal and stones, but in purifying the heart and developing the beauty of the soul."

On one occasion, he recalled to them the sacrifice of the late Shrimati Annapurna Devi, who was the first in Andhra

to set to her sisters a noble example of sacrifice and service, and said: "The very first day she met me she took off her ornaments—not one, but all. The women who witnessed the scene were amazed at what was happening. And, then, there was a shower of ornaments. And do you think she looked less handsome because of her having given away the ornaments? Rather she looked to me more handsome. The English language has the proverb: 'Handsome is that handsome does.' " —C. S.

KAUMUDI'S RENUNCIATION

" 'Your renunciation is a truer ornament than the jewellery you have discarded.' "

It has been my privilege to witness many touching and soul-stirring scenes during a busy life packed with a variety of rich experiences. But, at the moment of writing this, I cannot recall a scene more touching than that of the Harijan cause. I had just finished my speech at Badagara. In it, I had made a reasoned appeal to the women present for jewellery. I had finished speaking and was selling the presents received, when gently walked up to the platform Kaumudi, a girl of 16 years old. She took out one bangle and asked me if I would give my autograph. I was preparing to give it, when off came the other bangle. She had only one on each hand. I said: "You need not give me both. I shall give you the autograph for one bangle only."

She replied by taking off her golden necklace. This was no easy performance. It had to be disengaged from her long plait of hair. But the Malabar girl that she is, she had no false modesty about performing the whole process before a wondering public, counting several thousands of men and women. "But have you the permission of your parents ?," I asked. There was no answer. She had not yet completed her renunciation. Her hands automatically went to her ears and out came her jewelled ear-rings amid the ringing cheers of the public, whose expression of joy was no longer to be suppressed. I asked her again whether she had her parents' consent to the sacrifice. Before I could extract any answer from the shy girl, some one told me that her father was present at the meeting, that he was himself helping me by bidding

for the addresses I was auctioning, and that he was as generous as his daughter in giving to worthy causes. I reminded Kaumudi that she was not to have ornaments replaced. She resolutely assented to the condition. As I handed her the autograph, I could not help prefacing it with the remark: "Your renunciation is a truer ornament than the jewellery you have discarded." May her renunciation prove to have been an earnest of her being a true Harijan *Sevika* !

KAUMUDI'S MOMENTOUS DECISION

" 'I will select a husband who will not compel me to wear ornaments.' "

Gandhiji has written about the renunciation of Kaumudi, a little Malabari girl of 16. On the last day of Gandhiji's stay at Calicut, she came to see Gandhiji along with her father. Not having accompanied Gandhiji to Badagara, I saw Kaumudi for the first time. There was no guile about her. She spoke gently and was very reticent. She had studied up to the intermediate and followed the conversation well. Gandhiji wanted to know more about her sacrifice. He asked whether she had come to the meeting with her mind made up to make the sacrifice, or she made the decision instantaneously at the meeting.

"She had made up her mind at home," replied the father, "and had obtained our permission."

"But will the mother not feel sorry to see you without any jewellery ?"

"She will," said Kaumudi, "but I am sure she will not compel me to wear it again."

"But when you get married, as in due course you will, your husband will, perhaps, not like to see you without any ornaments. What will you do, then ? I have moral difficulty before me. I have written an article for the *Harijan* about your sacrifice, which is, indeed wonderful. I have said in that article that you would never wear any ornaments again. If you are not prepared for that, I shall have to alter that part of the article; or you will have to stand adamant against the wishes of your prospective husband. That you a Malabari girl may be capable of doing. Or, you will have to select

a husband who will be satisfied to have you without ornaments. You may tell me frankly what you feel."

Kaumudi slowly took in the full import of what Gandhiji said. It was a great thing she was called on to do. She had to make a momentous decision. She cogitated for a while, and then uttered only one sentence: "I will select a husband who will not compel me to wear ornaments."

Gandhiji's eyes beamed with delight. "I had Annapurna," he said, "she was married and yet she discarded all her jewellery, and she kept her pledge till the moment of her death. Now I have you." And he has never tired since then of speaking to women of Kaumudi's noble sacrifice.—C. S.

ANOTHER GREAT SACRIFICE

"I tempt all girls to give up their jewellery. I know it is a hard thing for a girl to do. There are all sorts of fashions to-day in society. I say: 'Handsome is that handsome does'."

At Trivandrum, among the many visitors was a girl of seventeen. As she came and stood before Gandhiji, he asked: "Who are you?"

"A little girl," she replied.

"What has a little girl to do with jewellery?" Gandhiji had seen the many ornaments she was wearing.

"Because I want to remain a girl," replied Meenakshi.

"Then, you must not wear jewellery," and Gandhiji narrated the story of Kaumudi's sacrifice.

"Kaumudi was sixteen, younger than you by an year, yet she discarded all her jewellery."

Meenakshi's eyes brightened. "I, too, would like to give jewellery," she said.

"Have you your parents' permission?"

"I will get it."

"I know Malabar girls are free."

"Shall I give it to you?"

"Yes, to Harijans."

"That is what I mean."

"If you think I am a *bona fide* Harijan, then give it to me. If you think I am a humbug, do not give it to me. I tempt all girls to give up their jewellery. I know it is a hard thing for a girl to do. There are all sorts of fashions to-day in society. I say: 'Handsome is that handsome does.'"

"If I give myself to you?"

"Yes, I have your cousin, and now I have you."

"That is settled."

"Even then, I give you one night to consider."

Next morning, when I saw Meenakshi, I could not easily recognize her. All her ornaments had gone. "Where are your ornaments?", I asked her.

"I have given them up."

"To Gandhiji?"

"No, that I could not do," she said. "My father has debts, and I cannot give away the ornaments. But I have made up my mind never to wear them again."

"Are your parents reconciled to the change you have made?"

"Father is. But mother finds it difficult to do so."

Later in the day, Meenakshi with her parents came to Gandhiji and gave him a gold bangle and a necklace for the Harijan cause. Gandhiji had known beforehand of the debts. He said to the parents: "You may not give these articles. Discharge whatever part of the debt you can with the ornaments that Meenakshi has discarded. She is never to ask for them again."

Tears flowed down Meenakshi's cheeks. Her emotion was too deep for words. She had made a life-long decision.

Gandhiji, then, asked the mother why she could not bless her daughter in her noble decision.

"She will have to be married, " replied the mother, "and it will be difficult for us to find out a husband who will be content to have her without ornaments."

"You may have no anxiety on that score," said Gandhiji, pacifying her fears, "I shall find you, when the time comes, not one but fifty candidates for Meenakshi's hand, and you select any one of them."

The mother blessed Meenakshi's decision. It was a touching scene. It is examples of noble sacrifice like these that sustain one and make life liveable in the midst of trials. May the renunciation of Kaumudi and Meenakshi act as a leaven and help to dispel the darkness of ignorance that keeps a sin like untouchability alive.—C. S.

WOMEN AND UNTOUCHABILITY

"Woman has a compassionate heart which melts at the sight of suffering. If, then, the sufferings of Harijans move you and you give up untouchability and with it the distinctions of high and low, Hinduism will be purified and Hindu society will take a great stride towards spiritual progress."

The following extracts are taken from Gandhiji's speeches delivered at various women's meetings in the course of his Harijan tour:

At Bilaspur

I want you, sisters, to give as much as you can for the Harijan cause. You have asked me, in your address, how you can serve the Harijans. I want you, above everything else, to root out untouchability from your hearts and serve the Harijan boys and girls as you would serve your own children. You should love them as your own relatives, your own brothers and sisters, children of the same Mother India. I have worshipped woman as the living embodiment of the spirit of service and sacrifice. Man can never be your equal in the spirit of selfless service with which Nature has endowed you. Woman has a compassionate heart which melts at the sight of suffering. If, then, the sufferings of Harijans move you and you give up untouchability and with it the distinctions of high and low, Hinduism will be purified and Hindu society will take a great stride towards spiritual progress. It will ultimately mean the well-being of the whole of India, *i.e.*, of 35 crores of human beings. And the wonderful purificatory process that one-fifth of the human race will undergo, cannot but have a healthy reaction on the

whole of humanity. This movement is fraught with such far-reaching results. This is a big movement—perhaps, the biggest going—of self-purification. I expect you to contribute your full share to it.

At Delhi

In the eyes of God, who is the creator of all, His creatures are all equal. Had He made any distinctions of high and low between man and man, they would have been visible as are the distinctions between, say, an elephant and an ant. But he has endowed all human beings impartially with the same shape and the same natural wants. If you consider Harijans untouchables because they perform sanitary service, what mother has not performed such service for her children ? It is the height of injustice to consider the Harijans, who are the most useful servants of the society, as untouchables and outcastes. I have undertaken this tour to awaken the minds of Hindu sisters to a sense of this sin. It can never be an act of merit to look down upon any human being as inferior to us. We are all worshippers of one God whom we worship under different names. We must, therefore, realizé our essential unity and give up untouchability, as well as the spirit of superiority and inferiority between human beings.

At Madras

I have come here to ask you to do one thing. Forget atogether that some are high and some are low. Forgelt altogether that some are touchables and some are untouchables. I know that you all believe in God as I do; and God cannot be so cruel and unjust as to make distinctions of high and low between man and man and woman and woman. This untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism, and I have not hesitated to say that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies. If one may use man's language about God, God has been very patient with

us. But I have no hesitation in saying that even God's patience can be exhausted, and He will no longer be patient towards this atrocity that man has been doing to man in Hindu India.

At Bangalore

There is too much of evil in us when we consider some persons as lower than ourselves. If we do not get rid of this evil, it will eat us up. There will not be a single Hindu left even to do penance, and I think we shall well deserve it if such a fate overtakes us. I am going from one end of India to the other just to utter the warning. You will, therefore, do a great act of virtue if you regard all Harijans as blood brothers and sisters.

At another meeting which he addressed after seeing some quarters of Harijans, which presented a sad contrast to what he had seen in Mysore, he said:

I believe in the maxim that we should treat others as we would wish that they should treat us. Now, the holes that I saw this morning, just this very moment, are not fit for human habitation. There is a minimum standard below which we dare not go without offending against humanity. The holes I saw do not satisfy that minimum. I wish that in this place, which is in many respects a beautiful place, this blot may be removed at the first opportunity. I have been told that arrangements have been already made to provide these unfortunate brothers and sisters with better dwellings. But in giving such aid you will agree with me that time is a vital factor. Let it not be said of your arrangements, when they are ready, that they are too late.

"God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable, because of his or her birth, can command our allegiance. It is a denial of God and Truth which is God."

In his last speech of the Harijan tour, which was made at the women's meeting in Benares, Gandhiji summarized his position on the question of untouchability as follows:

It is a tragedy that religion for us means to-day nothing more than restrictions on food and drink, nothing more than adherence to a sense of superiority and inferiority. Let me tell you that there cannot be grosser ignorance than this. Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority or inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable, because of his or her birth, can command our allegiance. It is a denial of God and Truth which is God. God, who is the embodiment of Truth and Right and Justice, could never have sanctioned a religion or practice which regards a fifth of our vast population as untouchables. I want you, therefore, to rid yourselves of this monstrous notion. Untouchability attaching to unclean work is there, must be there. It applies to everyone of us. But the moment we have washed ourselves clean of dirt or filth, we cease to be untouchables. But no work or conduct can render a man or woman untouchable for all time.

Sinners we are all to a greater or less extent, and everyone of our spiritual books—*Gita, Bhagvat,* and *Tulsi-Ramayana*—declares in no uncertain terms that whoever

seeks refuge in Him, whoever takes His name, shall be free from sin. That covenant is for all mankind.

There is another simple test that I want you to apply to this question. Every species, human and sub-human, has some distinguishing mark, so that you can tell a man from a beast, or a dog from a cow and so on. Have the so-called untouchables any distinguishing mark declaring them to be untouchables? They are as much human as every one of us, and we do not regard even sub-human beings as bearing the mark of untouchability. Why and whence, then, this monstrous injustice? It is not religion, but the grossest species of irreligion. I want you to cast off that sin, if you still happen to have it in you.

The only way in which you can expiate this sin of centuries is to befriend the Harijans, by going to their quarters, by hugging their children as you do your own, by interesting yourselves in their welfare, by finding out whether they get enough to eat, whether they get pure water to drink, whether they have the fresh light and air that you enjoy as of right. The other way is for each of you to start the spinning sacrifice and to pledge yourselves to wear *khadi*, which supports millions of these submerged human beings. The spinning sacrifice will help you, in some slight measure, to identify yourselves with them, and every yard of *khadi* you wear will mean some coppers going into the pockets of the Harijans and the poor. The last thing is to contribute your mite to the Harijan Fund, which has no other end but the amelioration of the lot of the Harijans.

TEAR DOWN THE PURDAH

> "Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the *purdah*. It must grow from within, and, to be worth anything, it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation."

Whenever I have gone to Bengal, Bihar or the United Provinces, I have observed the *purdah* system more strictly followed than in the other provinces. But when I addressed a meeting at Darbhanga late at night, and amid calm surroundings free from noise and bustle and unmanageable crowds, I found in front of me men, but behind me and behind the screen were women, of whose presence I knew nothing till my attention was drawn to it. The function was in connection with the laying of the foundation-stone of an orphanage, but I was called upon to address the ladies behind the *purdah*. The sight of the screen behind which my audience, whose numbers I did not know, was seated made me sad. It pained and humiliated me deeply. I thought of the wrong being done by men to the women of India by clinging to a barbarous custom which, whatever use it might have had when it was first introduced, had now become totally useless and was doing incalculable harm to the country. All the education that we have been receiving for the past 100 years seems to have produced but little impression upon us, for I note that the *purdah* is being retained even in educated households, not because the educated men believe in it themselves, but because they will not manfully resist the brutal custom and sweep it away at a stroke. I have the privilege of addressing hundreds of meetings of women attended by thousands. The din and the

noise created at these meetings make it impossible to speak with any effect to the women who attend them. Nothing better is to be expected so long as they are caged and confined in their houses and little courtyards. When, therefore, they find themselves congregated in a big room and are expected all of a sudden to listen to some one, they do not know what to do with themselves or with the speaker. And when silence is restored, it becomes difficult to interest them in many everyday topics, for they know nothing of them having never been allowed to breathe the fresh air of freedom. I know that this is a somewhat exaggerated picture. I am quite aware of the very high culture of these thousands of sisters whom I get the privilege of addressing. I know that they are capable of rising to the same height that men are capable of, and I know, too, that they do not have occasions to go out. But this is not to be put down to the credit of the educated classes. The question is, why have they not gone further? Why do not our women enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to walk out and have fresh air?

Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be super-imposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the *purdah*. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything, it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their women-folk, even as the latter are compelled to trust them. Let us not live with one limb completely or partially paralysed. Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent, even as he was himself. But, for robust independence, Draupadi is, perhaps, a better example. Sita was gentleness incarnate. She was a delicate flower. Draupadi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhima himself to her imperious will. Bhima was terrible to every one, but he was a lamb before Draupadi. She stood in no need of protection

from any of the Pandavas. By seeking to-day to interfere with the free growth of the womanhood of India, we are interfering with the growth of free and independent-spirited men. What we are doing to our women, and what we are doing to the untouchables, recoils upon our heads with a force thousand times multiplied. It partly accounts for our weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us, then, tear down the *purdah* with one mighty effort.

THE DOOM OF PURDAH

"The sooner it is recognized that many of our social evils impede our march towards *Swaraj*, the greater will be our progress towards our cherished goal. To postpone social reform, till after the attainment of *Swaraj*, is not to know the meaning of *Swaraj*."

A reasoned appeal, signed by many most influential people of Bihar and almost an equal number of ladies of that province, advising the total abolition of the *purdah* has been just issued in Bihar. The fact that over fifty ladies have signed the appeal shows that if the work is carried on with vigour, the *purdah* will be a thing of the past in Bihar. It is worthy of note that the ladies who have signed the appeal are not of the anglicized type, but orthodox Hindus. It definitely states:

"We want that the women of our province should be as free to move about and take their legitimate part in the life of the community in all particulars as their sisters in Karnatak, Maharashtra and Madras do in an essentially Indian way, avoiding all attempts at Europeanization, for while we hold that a change from enforced seclusion to a complete anglicization would be like dropping from frying pan into fire, we feel that *purdah* must go, if we want our women to develop along Indian ideals. If we want them to add grace and beauty to our social life and raise its moral tone, if we want them to be excellent managers at home, helpful companions of their husbands and useful members of the community, then the *purdah*, as it now exists, must go. In fact, no serious step for their welfare can be taken unless the veil is torn down; and it is our conviction that if once the energy of half of our population, that has been imprisoned artificially, is released, it will create a force which, if properly guided, will be of immeasurable good to our province."

I know the evil effects of the *purdah* in Bihar. The movement has been started none too soon.

The movement has a curious origin. Babu Ramanandan Mishra, a *khadi* worker, was desirous of rescuing his wife from the oppression of the *purdah*. As his people would not let the girl come to the *Ashrama* (Sabarmati), he took two girls from the *Ashrama* to be companions to his wife. One of them, Radhabehn, Maganlal Gandhi's daughter, was to be the tutor. She was accompanied by the late Dalbahadur Giri's daughter, Durgadevi. The parents of the girl-wife resented the attempt of the *Ashrama* girls to wean young Mrs. Mishra from the *purdah*. The girls braved all difficulties. Meanwhile, Maganlal Gandhi went to see his daughter and steel her against all odds to persist in her efforts. He took ill in the village where Radhabehn was doing her work and died at Patna. The Bihar friends, therefore, made it a point of honour to wage war against the *purdah*. Radhabehn brought her charge to the *Ashrama*. Her coming to the *Ashrama* created additional stir and obliged the husband, who was already prepared for it, to throw himself in the struggle with greater zeal. Thus, the movement having a personal touch promises to be carried on with energy. At its head is that seasoned soldier of Bihar, the hero of many battles, Babu Brijkishore Prasad. I do not remember his having headed a movement that has been allowed to die.

The appeal fixes the 8th of July next as the date on which to inaugurate an intensive campaign against the system, which puts a cruel ban on social service by one half of Bihar humanity, and which denies it freedom in many cases and even the use of light and fresh air. The sooner it is recognized that many of our social evils impede our march towards *Swaraj*, the greater will be our progress towards our cherished goal. To postpone social reform, till after the attainment of *Swaraj*, is not to know the meaning of *Swaraj*. Surely, we must be incapable of defending ourselves or healthily competing with the other nations, if we allow the better half of ourselves to become paralysed.

I, therefore, congratulate the Bihar leaders on their having earnestly taken up the struggle against the *purdah*. The success of such a reform especially, as of all reform generally, depends upon the purity of the workers. A great deal will rest with the ladies who have signed the appeal. If notwithstanding their having given up the *purdah*, they retain the original modesty of India's womanhood and show courage and determination in the face of heavy odds, they will find success quickly awaiting their effort. The campaign against the *purdah*, if properly handled, means mass education of the right type for both men and women of Bihar.

PURDAH IN BIHAR

"If the campaign is well organized and continued with zeal, the *purdah* should become a thing of the past."

The organized demonstration against the *purdah* that was held in many important centres in Bihar on the 8th instant was, a Bihari friend's letter tells me, successful beyond the expectations of the organizers. The *Searchlight* report of the Patna meeting opens thus:

"A unique spectacle was witnessed at the mixed meeting of ladies and gentlemen on the 8th July held at Patna in the Radhika Sinha Institute on Sunday last. In spite of heavy rains, that fortunately stopped just at the time of the meeting, the gathering was unexpectedly large. In fact, half of the spacious hall of the Radhika Sinha Institute was crowded with ladies, three-fourths of whom were such as had been observing *purdah* a day before, nay, an hour before."

The following is the translation of the resolution adopted at the meeting:

"We, the men and women of Patna, assembled hereby declare that we have to-day abolished the pernicious practice of *purdah*, which has done and is doing incalculable harm to the country, and particularly to women, and we appeal to the other women of the province, who are still wavering, to abolish this system as early as they can and thereby advance their education and health."

A provisional committee was formed at the meeting to carry on an intensive propaganda against *purdah* and for the spread of women's education in the province of Bihar. A third resolution advised the formation of *Mahila Samitis* in every town and every village of the province. And a fourth resolution was passed to the effect that *Mahila Ashramas* should be started at different

places where ladies might stay for certain periods and receive a training so as to become 'good wives', 'worthy mothers' and 'useful servants' of the country. Over 5,000 rupees were promised on the spot for the purpose, and I see many ladies among the donors, giving anything between Rs. 250 and 25. The paper publishes reports of similar meetings in several places in Bihar. If the campaign is well organized and continued with zeal, the *purdah* should become a thing of the past. It should be noted that this is no anglicizing movement. It is an indigenous conservative effort, made by leaders who are conservative by nature and are yet alive to all the evils that have crept into Hindu society. Babu Brijkishore Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad, who, from far-off London, is keenly watching and supporting the movement, are no westernized specimens of Indian humanity. They are orthodox Hindus, lovers of Indian culture and tradition. They are no blind imitators of the West, and yet do not hesitate to assimilate whatever is good in it. There need, therefore, be no fear entertained by the timid and the halting ones, that the movement is likely to be in any shape or form disruptive of all that is most precious in Indian culture, and especially in feminine grace and modesty so peculiar to India's womanhood.

TO THE BURMESE WOMEN

"We, who come from India, are painfully surprised to see the beautiful Burmese women disfigure their mouths by cheroots and cigars. But I know it is a most difficult thing to speak about an evil which is enveloping the whole world."

Addressing a meeting at Moulmein, Burma, Gandhiji suggested the Burmese to take to the spinning wheel if they wanted to become self-contained and happy, and to the women he said:

You are enjoying a freedom which no other women on earth are enjoying at the present moment. You are noted for your industry and your skill. You have great organizing capacity and if you will but revise your taste for foreign fineries and take to heart the message of simplicity that I have given you, you will revolutionize your life.

* * *

I have really less courage to speak about the terrible curse of smoking. But I understand that throughout Burma, I shall not find a single man or woman free from this habit. We, who come from India, are painfully surprised to see beautiful Burmese women disfigure their mouths by cheroots and cigars. But I know that it is a most difficult thing to speak about an evil which is enveloping the whole world. If you have heard the name of Tolstoy, I quote his authority to show that Tolstoy, being an inveterate smoker himself, was speaking from experience when he said that tobacco dulled the intellect of man, let alone other senses. Indeed, he cites examples to show that most deliberate crimes have been committed under the influence of smoke, and in one of his beautiful stories he pictures the villain of the piece

as committing murder, not after drink but after having had a smoke. Although it is perfectly true that the smoke habit is on the increase, and it has amongst its supporters many of the brilliant men of the world, there is a spirit of resistance against it and the opponents are some of the best men in the West and great moralists.

QUESTION BOX

MEN AND WOMEN

Q. I should like to know whether you would approve of men and women *satyagrahis* mixing promiscuously and working together, or whether they should be organized into separate units with a clear delimitation of the field of each. My experience is that the former must lead, as it has led, to a lot of indiscipline and corruption. If you agree with me, what rules would you suggest to combat the potential evil?

A. I should like to have separate units. Women have more than enough work amongst women. Our womenfolk are terribly neglected, and hundreds of intelligent women workers of sterling honesty are required to work among them. On principle, too, I believe in the two sexes functioning separately. But I would lay down no hard and fast rules. Good sense must govern the relations between the two. There should be no barrier erected between the two. Their mutual behaviour should be natural and spontaneous.

WOMEN AS THE STRONGER SEX

Q. Is not non-resistance submission to the strong?

A. Passive resistance is regarded as the weapon of the weak, but the resistance for which I had to coin a new name altogether is the weapon of the strongest. I had to coin a new word to signify what I meant. But its matchless beauty lies in the fact that, though it is the weapon of the strongest, it can be wielded by the weak in body, by the aged, and even by the children if they have stout

hearts. And since resistance in *satyagraha* is offered through self-suffering, it is a weapon pre-eminently open to women. We found last year that women in India, in many instances, surpassed their brothers in sufferings and the two played a noble part in the campaign. For, the idea of self-suffering became contagious and they embarked upon amazing acts of self-denial. Supposing that the women and the children of Europe became fired with love of humanity, they would take the men by storm and reduce militarism to nothingness in an incredibly short time. The underlying idea is that women, children and others have the same soul, same potentiality. The question is one of drawing out the limitless power of truth.

Economic Independence of Women

Q. Some people oppose a modification of laws relating to the right of married woman to own property, on the ground that economic independence of woman would lead to the spread of immorality among women and disruption of domestic life. What is your attitude on the question?

A. I would answer the question by a counter question: Has not independence of man and his holding property led to the immorality among men? If you answer 'yes,' then let it be so also with women. And when women have rights of ownership and the rest like men, it would be found that the enjoyment of such rights is not responsible for their vices or their virtues. Morality which depends upon the helplessness of a man or woman has not much to recommend it. Morality is rooted in the purity of our hearts.

Position of Women in Society

Q. The awakening of civil and political consciousness among Indian women has created a conflict between their traditional

domestic duties and their duty towards society. If a woman engages in public work, she may have to neglect her children or her household. How is the dilemma to be solved?

A. More often than not a woman's time is taken up, not by the performance of essential domestic duties, but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master and for her own vanities. To me, this domestic slavery of woman is a symbol of our barbarism. In my opinion, the slavery of the kitchen is a remnant of barbarism mainly. It is high time that our womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of a woman's time.

Q. At the elections, your Congressmen expect all manner of help from us, but when we ask them to send out their wives and daughters to join us in public work, they bring forth all sorts of excuses and want to keep them close prisoners within the four domestic walls. What remedy do you suggest?

A. Send the names of all such anti-diluvian fossils to me for publication in the *Harijan.*

A Widow's Difficulty

Q. I am a Bengali Brahman widow. Since my widowhood—these 24 years—I have observed strict rules about my food. I have my separate widow's kitchen and utensils even in my own family. I believe in your ideal of truth and non-violence. I am a habitual wearer of *khadi* since 1930, and a regular spinner. Our *Mahila Samaj* has established a Harijan school in a Harijan village in Dacca. I go there and mix with the Harijans. I mix freely with my Muslim sisters towards whom I have nothing but goodwill. But I cannot interdine with Harijans or any other non-Brahman caste. Now, can't orthodox widows like me enlist as *satyagrahis*, passive and active?

A. According to the Congress Constitution you have a perfect right to be enlisted. You can even enforce your right. But since you ask me, I would dissuade you from being enlisted. I know the punctilious way

in which Bengali widows observe the rules custom has prescribed for them. But widows, who dedicate themselves to the country's cause, and that in a non-violent way, should have no scruples in dining with anybody. I do not believe that dining with people, no matter who they are, hinders spiritual progress. It is the motive which is the deciding factor. If a widow approaches every task in a spirit of service, it is well with her. A widow may observe all the dining and other rules with meticulous care, and yet not be a true widow if she is not of a pure heart. You know, as well as I do, that outward observance of rules governing a society often covers hypocrites. I would, therefore, advise you to disregard the restriction on interdining and the like as a hindrance to spiritual and national progress, and concentrate on cultivation of the heart. In the *Satyagraha Dal,* I should like to have not self-satisfied persons but those who have used their reason, and chosen a way of life that has commended itself to both head and heart.

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